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Christian and Hindu-Buddhist

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MONASTICISM

CHRISTIAN AND HINDU-BUDDHIST

By

Anthony Elenjimittam

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CATHERINE OF SIENA SCHOOL, MOUNT MARY, BANDRA, BOM
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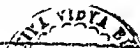
"Near Durban, in South Africa, there is a Trappist monastery. The rigour observed at the time I visited the place was very great. They had nothing like privacy for themselves; they had to get up at 2.30 a.m. They had purely vegetarian food; they strictly observed the vow of silence. Only two or three, who had to go the market or speak to visitors, could speak. All others had to work in silence. They were giving instruction to the Zulus. They were workers for life. They added to their learning a calling. They were carpenters, potters, shoe-makers. They made all sorts of experiments. Their monastery was a model of beauty, a veritable garden, with not a particle of dust anywhere and there was a sweet silence pervading the whole atmosphere. My idea is to have a training institution of this type; if anything, I would do better; but we are fallen from grace. We used to have this rigorous discipline in our country. But we have not progressed, while they have progressed."

—MAHATMA GANDHI

On Training Institutions,

Report published in THE HINDU, MADRAS,

Nov. 1934.



PROLOGUE

December 24th, 1946. It was a cool bright evening when Mahatma Gandhi started his evening walk. With Abba Gandhi and the present writer on either side, Gandhiji moved fast with the breeze that seemed to waft us all through the paddy fields and grassy lands of Noakhali, East Bengal.

Gandhiji thanked me for having brought the Christmas gifts to him and his community at Sri-rampur from the Red Cross and American friends Service Unit camp at Hamchadi where I was staying. Then Gandhiji—to us, of course, *Bapuji*, *Father* as we all lovingly called him—with a sigh turned to me and said:

“Anthony, is not Christ the Prince of Peace? And yet how far removed the Christians are from the path of Peace? I don't mean their imperialism and colonialism. But even the improved scientific means are used for unimproved ends. I don't mean to say that we here in India are in any way superior to Christians even in religion. Look at the Hindus and Moslems cutting each other's throat in the name of religion. Haven't you seen houses burnt, men mutilated and killed, wives and virgins raped, temples and mosques desecrated—all in the name of religion, each party claiming absolute truth to one's own religion and denying it to others!

Now, Anthony, I want you to devote your life to break barriers and build bridges between religions and teach with your life and words that religion essentially consists in Love of God and Mankind. ‘Charity is the root of religion’, as Tulsidas says, ‘and abandon not charity as long as there is breath in your nostrils’. You are too much of an intellectual; but religion is what St Paul called ‘the fragrance of Christ’. That is charity. Work for inter-religious understanding, because you have had the grace of God to know Christianity, Buddhism, Hinduism and other religious cultures from close quarters, not as an outside student, but as an inside devotee. *Sarvadharmasamanatva* does not mean

that all religions are equal or the same; but at deeper levels they all converge to God-realisation and Service of Humanity. I want you to be an apostle of inter-religious harmony and unity. You have all my prayers and blessings for that great mission that is given to you by God...."

For nearly ten years I lived almost exclusively with non-Catholics like the Anglicans, Protestants of various denominations, Buddhists, Theosophists, the Hindus and Parsees, Lamaists and Theravadians. This long interlude (1943 to 1953) in my life as a Dominican Friar and then as a priest has widened my horizon of Catholicism which is no more India or Europe-bound but as wide as God, Christ and His Kingdom.

The present book on *Monasticism—Christian and Hindu-Buddhist*—is written partly to fulfil my vocational mission for inter-religious understanding, and partly to gain a glimpse into the sky-high catholicity of my Mother Church and my Mother India, thereby building a bridge between my fellow-tramps in Buddhism, Hinduism and Catholicism.

ANTHONY ELENJIMITTAM,
Aquinas Hall,
Mount Mary — Bandra,
Bombay-50,
7 March 1969.

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PUBLISHED IN THE BIRTH CENTENARY YEAR 1969
OF MAHATMA GANDHI

Dedication

*There in the mud hut of Srirampur in Noakhali,
In the year nineteen fourty six on Christmas Eve,
After the evening walk across the green paddg fields,
Do you remember, my Bapuji dear, our silent communion in
God?*

*On that evening, after consulting the Kindly Light
You told me; "Anthony, leave aside politics, go to your God
: given task.*

*You have still to grope, but sure, God will show His way to you;
The harvest is indeed great, but, labourers are few, so few".*

*Bapuji, we are both schooled in the same classroom of God.
Like Socrates of yore you lived with Truth-transfigured face,
And died a martyr's death, expiating the sins of this blind world.
In the good company of heroes like Abraham Lincoln, two
Kennedies,*

*Martin Luther King, Joan of Arc, Lucy, Agnes and Cecilia
Your laurels never fade, lit bright by the ray of God.
More than the architect of Indian Independence and our Father,
You belong to the wide world in the steps of Buddhas, Krishnas,
Rams.*

*The long standing debt I owe to your Love, Guidance and Help
As my Guide, Guru and Inspiration, at your feet I place this
.. book,*

*Dedicating this offering in pledge of battles still to be faced
: and won.*

—ANTHONY ELENJIMITTAM

2nd October 1969

THE MONASTIC URGE

"A heart untouched by worldly things,
A heart that is not swayed by sorrow,
A heart passionless, secure—
That is the greatest blessing."

— *Buddha*—Sutta Nipata

"Be ye perfect as your Heavenly Father is perfect."

— *Jesus*

"When are liberated all
The desires that lodge in one's heart,
Then a mortal becomes immortal
Then he reaches Brahman".

— *Brih. Upanishad*

"Point out the Way—however dimly, and lost among the host—as does the evening star to those who tread their path in darkness. Give light and comfort to the toiling pilgrim, and seek out him who knows still less than thou, who in his wretched desolation sits starving for the bread of Wisdom—let him hear the Law."

— *The Voice of Silence*

One of the most deep-rooted basic urges of the human soul is the "hunger and thirst after Righteousness", *Dharma*, God. The primary basic urges of man are self, sex, herd and God. Of these four, the God-urge is the centre and circumference of monasticism.

The sphere around which revolves the instinctive urge for self-preservation and self-expression is indeed vast, being co-extensive with life itself. As the traditional walls between the animate and the inanimate worlds are now being shatter-

ed as a result of progress in modern biology and nuclear physics, the self-urge is now proved to be operative in all beings. That self-assertion, in all its forms, is an entitative quality which was taught by monistic and idealistic philosophers of both the East and the West. But it was reserved to modern physics to demonstrate it experimentally.

The orbit of sex-urge is much smaller than the urge for self-preservation for the simple reason that sex differentiations are found only in more complex forms of the plant and animal life. In spite of the dogma of the orthodox Freudians, sex urge is not the one all-pervasive factor in human life. It is a basic urge, but not always the strongest and the most pervasive in all normal human beings. The border-line between sex-urge and God-urge may be thin, and it may run parallel; but the two are distinct, mutually exclusive of each other, one displacing the other.

The herd instinct is there because man is a social animal. The herd in man, often a subconscious urge as in birds and fishes and mammals, becomes rationalised and canalised in social life as in many civil, political, religious and economic organisations. Monasticism, in its community form, has its roots in the sub-conscious herd instinct made conscious and rational with a view to reaching Self-realisation or God-attainment.

The orbit of God-urge in man is the smallest of all, but the most powerful of all other instincts. God-urge, when it blossoms forth and fructifies in man, has power to overshadow and neutralise all other urges in him, as it is clear from the lives of martyred saints who courted death for the sake of God, scorning sex-pleasures and that innate, instinctive clinging on to life and social ties.

The urge to see God face to face, reach Him, relish and realise Him, the vital need for Self-un-

foldment and reach the portals of *Nirvanic* bliss by treading the path of *Dharma*, dawns in man only after his mental, ethical and moral consciousness has reached a certain degree of development. Until then the urge for God-realisation—variously called as Self-realisation, spiritual perfection, emancipation of the Spirit, attainment of Nirvana, treading the path of *Dharma*, etc.—lies dormant.

In some others, through neglect, sloth or heedlessness, the God-urge grows feeble until it fizzles out. But, in those, in whom the lion of Divinity wakes up, and their super-conscious powers are aroused, there is a steady growth in Self-unfoldment until they bear fruits, "some thirtyfold, some sixtyfold and some a hundredfold", as the parable of the sower narrated by Jesus puts it. They storm the fortress of the Self, tread all the way along the path of *Dharma* and enter the *sancta sanctorum* of the highest philosophical vision and religious realisation. Many are called, but few are chosen to reach God. Many start on the pilgrimage to Self, but few reach their destination. Hence the Gita says:

"One, perchance, in thousands of men, strives after perfection; and one, perchance, among the faithful strivers after perfection, knows me in reality." —Gita VII, 3

In the *Sermon on the Mount* Jesus tells us.

"Enter ye in at the narrow gate. It is the broad gate and a wide road that leads on to perdition, and those who go in that way are many, indeed; but how small is the gate, how narrow the road that leads on to life, and how few there are that find it!" —*Mathew* VI, 13, 14

Monasticism is this "narrow road that leads on to life". The urge for spiritual perfection, the innate thirst for God-vision, the undying yearning for the attainment of *Nirvana* finds its foremost expression in monasticism. The ascetic practices and mystical experiences of monks in thier mon-

asteries, and of nuns in their convents and cloisters may never even find an echo in this atomic and space age. Yet, when we withdraw even for a short while from the noisy politics, cut-throat economics and the neurotic environment in many modern cities, and stand face to face with our own selves, in the stillness of our heart and the deep quiet of our soul, we begin to brood over those innate, personal and all-important problems of life and death, happiness and misery. It is then that we begin to understand, and perhaps appreciate, why so many thousands of young men and women in Christianity, Buddhism, Hinduism, Sufism, Jainism and in some other religions, renounced wealth, pomp, pleasures of the senses and other worldly entanglements and devoted themselves to the cult of God and the realisation of the higher Self.

Historically, Buddhism and Catholic Christianity had, and today still have, the largest and the best forms of organised monasticism. Next in importance comes Hinduism, although Hindu monasticism has never been an organised and centralised force as in Christianity and Buddhism. The silent, disciplined and industrious lives of hundreds and thousands of monks, friars, nuns, hermits, religious brothers and sisters and *bhikkhus* (literally, mendicants), is certainly an eye-opener and also the answer to deeper problems of life and death, happiness and misery, time and eternity, problems that make the soul of man restless until it reaches God, Self, *Nirvana*.

Monasticism, in its accepted and narrow sense, means the graded process of training of candidates from the novitiate up to their monastic or sacerdotal ordination and ministry. But, in a much wider and unconventional sense, monasticism means God-urge leading humans to the pinnacles of Self-realisation and the subsequent Self-realised

dynamics in society for the moral health, and spiritual emancipation of the suffering mankind. In the former sense, Sariputta, Kasyap, St Thomas Aquinas, St Bernard, Swami Vivekananda and Swami Dayanahda are great monks. In a much wider sense, Mahatma Gandhi, Sri Aurobindo, Sri Ramakrishna, Ramana Maharshi, Rabindranath Tagore, Khagava and others are great monks. In this latter sense, any aspiration, urge or action purporting to lead a higher life of the spirit springs from the monastic core.

The story of Prince Siddharta, born in Kapilavastu, in the Terai district of Nepal, at the blooming age of twenty-nine renouncing his wealth and heraldry, his young beautiful wife Yashodhara, and his newly-born only son Rahula, exchanging his royal attire with the tattered clothes of a street beggar, and then, in the dead of that silent night, setting off in quest of life-wisdom, suffering hardships and ordeals for full seven years, and, after having attained Enlightenment, Wisdom that emancipates, *Nirvana*, journeying through the length and breadth of North India, preaching the *Dhamma* and organising the *Sangha* (Buddha's monastic order of mendicant monks) for over full four decades, and then passing away in Kusinara with philosophic calm and Self-realised bliss, and a hundred other episodes, sayings and doings of Buddha are still read, studied and meditated upon with awe, admiration and rapture by thoughtful men and women in the entire civilised world.

Then, there is the story of Jesus, the greatest story ever told in the chronicles of men and gods, the story of paradoxes, of the crucifixion and resurrection of the *homo sapiens*, of the God-man, of the Son of Man. Born in a manger amidst the household cattle, in that silent night, holy night, when all was calm, all was bright, in heavenly peace slept

that infant who was pre-ordained to become the *Light of the World*. Edwin Arnold rightly tells us the story of Buddha as the *Light of Asia*, and of Christ as the *Light of the World*. Yet, spiritually Jesus is as much the Light of Asia as was Buddha the light of the world. Jesus grew up in lowliness, utter poverty, following the profession of a humble carpenter. But in silence and solitude, prayer and meditation, industry and hard labour he prepared himself for his great mission, the redemption of mankind at once through his life-teachings and his as-cerificial blood. Never we have in the pages of history a story so moving and touching as the short ministry of the Lord Jesus, the story of his passion and his crucifixion between two thieves, and his final resurrection, his triumph over sin and death. To those serious, sincere souls who have understood the life and teachings of Jesus, he is their "way, life, and truth". Even after twenty centuries millions eluster around Jesus; and in his family are found monks and nuns—monasticism in its restricted and larger connotations—in their hundreds of thousands devoted to the great task of self-purification, sanctification of their own souls and salvation of others.

Then comes the story of Plato, the Divine, who, abstaining from worldly pomps and sensual pleasures, devoted himself to the pursuit of the highest philosophic wisdom which ancient Greece could boast of. Plato never married, nor had children; yet, all the idealistic philosophers and most seraphic souls of the West were his spiritual children. Many Platonists, Neo-Platonists including the "Cambridge Platonists" of the nineteenth century were monks in the strict sense. Plotinus, Philo, Pythagoras and Socrates were great patriarchs of western monasticism. The Greek philosophic monasticism and Christian religious idealism join-

ed hands to give birth to what may be generally termed as western christian monasticism.

These feats of self-denial and mental discipline can have no other explanation but in the basic urge we all have for the development of our personality, our self-unfoldment, for the realisation of our true humanity, for the conquest of the limitless realms of God's love. If these historical facts fail to convince us of the fallacy of our ultra-modern scientists or pseudo-scientists who prate that the age of religion and God-ideals has gone by, we may learn the truth of monasticism from our own experience. The growing neurosis and psychosis of the modern man is largely due to the lack of a religious outlook on life, a God-ward move and inner urge for imponderable values. Yet, when the same neurotics regain their lost faith and religious attitude, their "Ten Commandments" and *Panchasila*, thier old natural self is discovered with integration and inner poise. St Augustine fell victim to various diseases of the nervous system and even physical ailments when he followed the path of unfettered free thought and free love without any single-minded devotion towards the ideal which religion gives to its votaries. But after his conversion, and after he had embraced monastic life, he was cured of his neuroses and diseases and he lived healthily for over eight decades. What is true of St Augustine, of St Francis of Assisi, is true of the modern man also. These psychological laws of personal integration are as universal as the laws of gravitation. C.G. Jung, one of the greatest authorities on this subject, wrote:

"During the past thirty years, people from all civilised countries of the earth have consulted me. Among all my patients in the second half of life—that is to say, over thirty-five—there has not been one whose problem in the last resort was not that of finding a religious outlook on life. It is safe to say that every one of them fell ill because he had

lost that which the living religions of every age have given to their followers, and none of them has been really healed who did not regain the religious outlook."

—*Modern Man in Search of a Soul*, p. 264

Monasticism, being the climax of the religious urge in man, has the most therapeutic value in healing various psycho-neurotic ailments of the machine man. That is the reason why C.G. Jung sent his clarion call to monks, nuns, priests and "clergyman and the psychotherapist, to join forces to meet this great spiritual task of our age" (*ibid* p. 259).

In a world of astonishing technological progress and the most glamorous advertisement of sense and sex, it is, indeed, still more astonishing to see the vast panorama of men and women in the East and the West, in the Christian, Buddhist and Hindu lands, who, abandoning the most promising worldly prospects and renouncing the charms of wealth and sex, submit themselves to the most rigorous self-discipline of the monastic life with a view to realising their Self, seeing God and reaching Him. Whether in the Christian concept of beatific vision of God or the Buddhist concept of *Nirvana*, the great desideratum of all monastic souls is to reach the Ultimate Reality which is the Soul of our souls, the Self of our selves, Eternity behind the passing show of things in time, the *Substance* behind the shadow, Reality behind the appearance, the *Satya* behind the *maya*, Truth beyond the relativity of the world of time and space. Change and decay all around we see; hence the thoughtful among us search for, find and rest in the Reality that changes not, in that One who is without a second, the only source of Stoic imperturbability, Buddhist *Vairagya*, Yogic dispassion and Christian beatific vision.

This urge for spiritual emancipation by getting

more and more detached from the phenomenal and getting ever more deeply rooted in the Noumenon, the Ground of all that are born, grow, decay and die, is stronger than all other basic instincts in man. In fact, the other three instincts and urges, viz., self, sex and herd are found operative only as long as the God-urge—which we have called the monastic urge in man—is dormant. As the monastic urge awakens and waxes stronger in a person to that extent wane away all other urges.

As the sex urge can counteract and outweigh even the strongest urge for self-preservation, which is evident in those whom Eros strikes with death—not defeatist suicides resulting from failures in love, but those who willingly court death knowingly after joining the cold dance of Eros—so the monastic urge can neutralise, defeat, kill or sublimate the all-pervasive and powerful sex-urge and self-urge in man. This needs a systematic training of mind and will in discriminative reasoning, critical acumen, moral restraint and single-minded dedication to God, which results in contemplative bliss.

Matter is the source of division, while spirit is the basis of unity. That is the reason why sex, at long last, is bound to result in separation, frustration and vexation of the spirit. But love, which has its roots in the spirit of man, is the source of union of man with man, with God, with All. Hence it is that monks and nuns isolate themselves from sex and gold, and thereby find themselves falling into the arms of Infinite Love and Bliss.

A monk lives alone, all alone. He lives all by himself, even when he lives as a member of a large community, because inwardly, at heart, in the depths of his soul, his conversation is with Self, God. He is lifted above his self when he lives alone with God; he is just his self when he lives in self-recollection and self-possession; but he becomes lower than himself when he associates himself with others;

and in a crowd he is lost, if in his extrovert activities he loses his self-possession.

St Gregory the Great summed up the secret of the spiritual greatness of St Benedict in two words: *Secum vivebat*—Benedict “was living with his self”. It is out of the depths of this self-possession and self-recollection that Benedict reached the summits of Self-realisation, and became one of the great patriarchs of western monasticism. As from the silence of Benedict in Subiaco cave, so did Anthony, from his cave hermitage in Egypt, organise his own monastic disciples. The lives of many patriarchs of monasticism in Egypt, Europe, China, India, Japan, Persia and elsewhere go to converge towards the essentials of monasticism which are self-control, self-purification, self-knowledge and self-realisation. They also convince us that the more thoughtful and self-possessed one is, the easier it becomes to tame the tiger and ape in us, to lead the higher life of the Spirit, to become literally supermen.

Even when many individuals join to form a religious community of monks or nuns, the best among them struggle hard to keep their selves in isolation, so that their Self may remain an impregnable fortress where worldly passions and lusts cannot enter. Their inner sanctuary is lit bright through the practice of their monastic vows. The lamp of self-knowledge and self-luminous love burns ever in the sanctuary of their souls. They are in the world; but never of the world.

. Monastic vows are safeguards against weakness and license. They are the wings for monks to soar to the world of freedom, never barriers to it. Monastic life is protected so that monks and nuns may more easily and assuredly reach the goal of human existence. As Bernard of Clairvaux, a giant among Christian monks, has said:

“A religious (monk or nun) lives more purely, falls more

rarely, rises more quickly, walks with greater caution, is bedewed more often with heavenly graces, rests more securely, dies more confidently, is purged more speedily, and rewarded more abundantly."

Monastic urge is implanted in every human being. We are all potentially sinners or saints, *Buddhas* or *Maras*. This potential monastic urge, when actualised, is the source of manifold blessings to mankind. Creative works on philosophy, literature, art, music and expressions of charity, benevolence and compassion have all sprung from cloisters and hermitages in the past, and monastic cloisters should continue to fertilise the desert sands of worldiness in the future also. If sex has its glamour and romance, then Self-realisation has its own glamour and romance a hundredfold. If gold and fame could lure and entice human hearts, then, certainly, Self and God can produce much more intense ecstatic rapture in us, and fascinate us to lead a Self-realised and God-conscious life and engender real happiness and weal for many.

A monk, as the monastic urge grows, becomes more and more introspective. Yet, he is not a subjectivist. He sees things other than his self with greater clarity and objectivity, because he dwells in the source and Ground of all beings, God. Thomas Aquinas has taught us that God knows things of the universe "not in themselves, but in Himself". Knowledge, love and activities of a monk flow from the depths of Self-realisation, not through empirical and experimental research. A monk is really his mind. It is the mind that makes and unmakes a man. What a man thinks, that he becomes, the mind of man assuming the form of the object thought of. Hence the greatest discipline of a monk is the discipline of his mind. Buddha said:

"This mind of mine went formerly wandering about as it liked, as it listed, as it pleased; but I shall now hold it in

firmly, as the rider who wields the hook holds in the furious elephant. Be not thoughtless, watch over your thoughts. Draw yourself out of the evil ways, like an elephant sunk in mud." —*Dhammapada* XXIII.

Monasticism is the greatest research centre of human psychology, mental science and humanistic ethics. Here, even the hardened sinner, the most loathsome debauch and all prodigal children, find their soothing balm, oasis of peace and real, lasting inner joy as a result of the training and discipline received there. Emperor Asoka, once a cruel tyrant and an ambitious butcher, through the discipline of monastic life, became the greatest missionary monk of Buddhism. Through the magic touch of the monastic urge, Francis of Assisi, once a street reveller and a wreckless and dissipated youth, became the most amiable and poetic monk of Christendom. The history of conversion from vanities to godliness, from cosmic illusions to Reality, from sinfulness to sanctity is itself demonstrative of this God-urge, spiritual urge in man, which we have chosen to call the *monastic urge*.

The dead weight of a guilty conscience, the pangs and agonies of an unregenerate life, the sense of dichotomy and neuroses produced as a result of tension between skin-deep pleasures and soul-deep happiness are brought to an end, when the monastic urge has found expression through Self-realisation channels. Sex-lusts and soul-lights stand at antipodes. Lust and love are deadly enemies, one displacing the other. .

A monk and a worldly man may look like beings of the same species. But if rationality is the specific distinctive between man and mammal, then there is a world of difference. A sleeping and a dead man may look alike, but there is a world of difference between the two—life and death. Much wider is the gulf that separates wisdom and ignor-

ance, sin and sanctity, monasticism and worldly vanities. Plato had said:

"That which is seen is not the man, but there is need of a certain higher wisdom which will enable each of us, whoever he is, to recognise himself." —*Phaedo* 75 and 115.

Monks aspire after the highest wisdom—the wisdom of God and love of fellow-beings—attainable here below. The efforts of a recluse are crowned with success, when the old sense-sex-intoxicants do not harm him any more, like a demagnetised metal ceases to attract iron filings. The north pole of the soul, wherein the restless heart of man finds joy and rest, is reached by the pilgrim, after a long and tiresome journey.

In one of his most famous sermons which Buddha addressed to King Ajatasatru on the benefits accruing to a person by embracing the monastic life, the *Tathagata* said:

"Putting away the hankering after the world, he remains with a heart that hankers not, and purifies his mind of lusts. Putting away the corruption of the wish to injure, he remains with a heart free from ill-temper, and purifies his mind of malevolence. Putting away torpor of heart and mind, keeping his ideas clear, himself mindful and self-possessed, he purifies his mind of weakness and sloth. Putting away slurry and worry, he remains free from fretfulness, and with heart serene within, he purifies himself of irritability and vexation of spirit. Putting away wavering, he remains as one passed beyond perplexity; and no longer in suspense as to what is good, he purifies his mind of doubt. The Bhikhu (a mendicant monk), O king, so long as these five hindrances are not put away within him, looks upon himself as in debt, diseased, in prison, in slavery, lost on a desert road. But when these five hindrances have been put away within him, he looks upon himself as freed from debt, rid of disease, out of jail, a free man, secure".

—*Sammanaphala Suttanta*

Monasticism, then is the release of the soul from the prison house of bodily trammels and con-

taminations. It is the staircase, the lift, the "sky-master" that takes us high up to the pinnacles of spiritual perfection. As with coins, there are genuine and counterfeit monks. Genuine monasticism does really help men and women to cleanse them of dross, guilt and rust, and enables them to usher into the air of Freedom, Emancipation, *Mukti*. But counterfeit monasticism, like degeneration of any vocation or profession in life, is a means for easy and idle livelihood. But, as counterfeit coins could be tested by comparing them with the standard coins, and then withdrawn from circulation, so genuine monastic life could be easily discerned by comparing monks and nuns to their exemplar, those prophets and patriarchs around whom other monks gather and revolve like the planets around the sun, the satellites around their planets. Genuine monks we can recognise from the historical past, living experience or through philosophic intuition. Thus, as standard patterns for monks, stand out Sariputta, Mogallana, Bhodidharma and Nagarjuna, Sangamitra and Mahendra among the Buddhists; Sankara, Ramanuja, Tulsi Das, Patanjali and Yajnavalkya for the Hindus; Basil, Benedict, Dominic of Guzman, Francis of Assisi, Bernard of Clairvaux, Thomas Aquinas, Catherine of Siena, Vincent Ferrer, Savonarola and Ignatius Loyola for the Christians.

As we study the esoteric of monasticism in the lives of great spiritual prophets, monks and nuns, what strikes us most is not as much the difference as the similarity between the Christian, Hindu and Buddhist saints. The paths they tread may seem different; but the goal of Self-realisation they all reached is the same. God, if God, must be the same for all, irrespective of caste, creed or colour. Names by which people try to express that Ultimate Reality may be different; but the reality itself can-

not be different. God cannot be diversified by diverse names given him by the Hindus, Moslems, Christians, Parsees or the Buddhists. God, Theos, Allah, Deus, Dio, Dieu, Deva, Jehova, "I am who am", Brahman, Nirvana, etc., are but a few of hundreds of names by which the Ultimate Reality is known.] Once there is vital realisation of Him "in whom we live, move and have our being", the difference in names cease, and only the one ineffable relish of that Reality remains. The Upanishads say:

"As the sea-seeking rivers, leaving aside their (different) names and forms, disappear into the vast ocean, so, the wise, emancipated by knowledge, giving up different names and forms, merge into (the life of) the Supreme Person." —*Mundaka Upanishad* III 2. 7.

The present writer has lived and worked for over eight years as a full-fledged member of the Dominican Order in Italy. This Order, known as the Order of Friars Preachers—and in England as Blackfriars—is still one of the pioneering intellectual orders of the Catholic Church. He has lived and worked for about a decade with the various orders of the Hindu-Buddhist world as well. Out of his experience, then, he can state with confidence that, in spite of the artificial steel walls raised between Christianity and the Hindu-Buddhist world by a group of interested priests, theologians, liturgists and canonists, there is the most challenging and undeniable fact of the wonderful floriculture and blossoming of sanctity and life-wisdom, love of God and of neighbour in the East and in the West. This basic fact becomes evident when we live with an open mind in monasteries. We observe the same earnestness and yearning towards spiritual perfection in Tibetan Lamaist monasteries and Hindu *ashrams* as in the cloistered monasteries and convents of the Catholic Church.

The lives of saintly monks and nuns, the heroes and heroines of sanctity and love of God and man, I think, is the greatest challenge to the narrow communal fences and impenetrable religious walls built up and buttressed by those partisans of vested interests, whose professional success depends more upon floating on the surface differences in religion than on sinking deeper into the ocean of Life Divine, feebly and faintly reflected in the lives of saints, those mystics, ascetics who thrive in monasteries and hermitages and convents as naturally as roses and lilies in a cultivated garden. Different mounting waves are only on the surface of the ocean; deeper down, all is calm, all is quiet, all are one, one without a second.

In this book, we shall see the brighter and better side of the monastic life in its ideal form. It is not the degeneration of a vocation that we should study, but the vocation itself, as it is meant to be. "*The Aweful Disclosures of Maria Monk*", written by an American ex-nun, the *Twelve Years in a Monastery* by the late Joseph McCabe, an ex-Franciscan monk, and similar books are caricatures of certain abuses and anomalies and diseases actually eating into the vitals of the monastic life. These books are merely advertisements of counterfeit coins, glamourised and commercialised by publishing firms. They become the best sellers because of the sensationalism and exciting stories narrated by the authors in these books. In the *Aweful Disclosures*, the ex-nun depicts vividly how cloistered nuns have their clandestine romances with priests, and how the babies born out of that clandestine love are buried in the convent courtyard! These narratives are merely mountains made out of molehills, phantoms projected by the author from her imagination, who, through lack of enough self-control, might have experienced a hell within, to which she gave vent in that notorious book. The uncritical

cinema-fed and newspaper-nourished public readily buy and consume these books. They believe these stories and fail to grasp the essence of monasticism. Similarly, the *Twelve Years in a Monastery* by Joseph McCabe merely criticises the practice of blind obedience, irrational acceptance of dogmas and creeds, etc., but it fails to give us the X-rayed picture of the deeper aspects of the monastic life. Joseph McCabe, one of the outstanding rationalists and free-thinkers of our century, had to feed the Rationalist Press Association of London. In spite of his great contribution to the cause of Rationalism and Materialistic philosophy, it is a matter of deep regret that he, under the impact of his personal experience in the Franciscan order, utterly failed to understand the deeper currents of monastic life and religion in general. In the year 1944, I met Joseph McCabe a number of times at the Ethical Society of London. Then there were many points in common between him and me, an ex-Franciscan and an ex-Dominican. Yet, in the heart of our hearts, we felt that we had some fundamental differences too on religious and monastic subjects. It is because of those differences that McCabe continued to be what he always was, an uncompromising rationalist, positivist and empiricist; while, after years of wanderings in the wilderness of rationalism and materialistic communism of the orthodox Marxian type, I re-discovered my old monastic vocation, enriched with the vision and experience I gained by coming in touch with the best specimens of monasticism in Christian and the Hindu-Buddhist worlds. In this home-coming journey, this re-discovery of my own vocational mission, I must confess, the East, the Hindu-Buddhist world has been more helpful than the West, the Christian monastic orders. Nay, I must say, that even for the understanding of the Christian Gospels, the spirit of Christianity and of Christ, an

Asian and an Oriental, the knowledge of my own Asian continent has been more helpful than the big volumes on theology and scriptural studies and the voluminous apologetics of the West.

Nevertheless, in religion, philosophy and art, in all fields in which the creative spirit of man expresses itself—there is no East nor West. It is the Man the Universal, the Catholic, that stands up, transcending the limitations of the East or the West, and even the frontiers between the Christian and the Hindu-Buddhist worlds. Rudyard Kipling who said: "The East is East and the West is West, and the twain shall not meet", had also added: "But there is neither East nor West, border, breed nor birth, when two strong men stand face to face, though they come from the farthest ends of earth". This latter part of his verses is not often mentioned by those who are fond of quoting the first two lines.

The crisis of our times is basically ethical and spiritual. Caught up as we usually are in the vortex of a machine civilisation and positivistic sciences, we fight shy of the word *religion*. Nuclear weapons, earth satellites and the American moon-landing are all demonstrative of the immense strides we have made in technology and Science. Yet, man remains what he always was from time immemorial, a tiny infinitesimal speck lost in the infinity and eternity of God's creation, a higher mammal of the anthropoid species crawling upon the earth to feed his belly, self and sex. Man must remain restless until he gets back to the Ground of his being, to God, *Dharma*, back to ethics, morality, mysticism, interior life and imponderable values of human spirit, of which the nursery and repository have always been *monasticism*.

In times gone by, the mendicant monks of Europe, the Carmelites, the Franciscans, the Dominicans and other Orders for both men and women had an honoured place in the society. The Re-

formers like Luther, Calvin, Henry VIII, Zwingli and others emptied out the baby with the bath water, when they denounced the entire monastic system of the Church, without restricting themselves to merely correcting the abuses. In this age of the cinema, television and illustrated journals, monasticism is considered a relic of the past, with little or no meaning for our modern snobbish dandies and fashionable butterflies. There is derision, sneering, disdain and contempt.

In the name of Science, Rationalism and Progress, God, *Dharma* and values are brushed aside. In the Asian continent, some of the resurgent independent nations fancy that the time of the *Rishis*, *Buddhas* and *Bhikus* are gone by, never to return. These ideas are being injected into the hearts of our youth. And we need a corrective to these ideologies which make religious values an object of obloquy. In the modern republics of India and China, monks and nuns have hardly any social standing. Technicians, lawyers, scientists, journalists and professional politicians have usurped the role of God. Scriptures are being substituted with newspapers and dailies. The answer to these reversal of values is the spiritual challenge of men like Gandhiji, Vinobha, Aurobindo and their likes, and thousands of genuine monks and nuns in all parts of the world.

C.G. Jung has stated: "Whenever the Spirit of God is excluded from human consideration, an unconscious substitute takes its place." What are these substitutes of the *modern man* for old ideas like God, monasticism, chastity and soul? New gods like a political party, government, state, etc. This modern idolatry has its own nemesis which strike us down with neuroses, psychoses and even physical ailments. C.G. Jung, who is an authority on the subject, has said:

"The gods have become diseases; not Zeus but the solar

plexus now rules Olympus and causes the oddities of the professional office hour, or disturbs the brain of the politician and the journalist who then unwittingly release mental epidemics....When God is not recognised, selfish desires develop, and out of selfishness comes illness."

—*The Secret of the Golden Flower* p. 112, 113.

Out of his own personal experience as a practising psychoanalyst, C. G. Jung, came to the conclusion that a return to religious values is essential for the modern man to regain health and even his physical well-being. In 1932, Jung, contradicting the verdict of the orthodox Freudians to whom religion is self-alienation and a form of neurosis, called upon the thinking world to find in religion the sovereign remedy for most adult diseases. He stated:

"Our age has a blindness without parallel. We think we have only to declare an acknowledged form of faith to be incorrect or invalid, to become psychologically free of all the traditional effects of the Christian or Judaic religion." —*Psychological* p. 230.

I have my own experience to corroborate the truth of the above statement. I have known literally hundreds of cases of promising young men and women who became mentally and physically diseased, neurotics and psychotics, when they abandoned the basic tenets of their religious faiths. Among such friends of mine, some were Hindus, some Moslems, some Christians and some Buddhists. Regaining of their lost vitality and vigour, vision and creativity was conditional to their re-discovery of a religious faith that best suited their deeper individual need.

Out of the depths of my own miserable personal experience I can testify to the truth that life without God and religious values is a fatal disease without hope of cure, it is death without dying, it is slow dying of body, mind and spirit of man. The mon-

astic urge in man, the God-urge and jDharma-centre in man, cannot be long stifled and disregarded by any adult person without its nemesis in his body and soul and spirit.

Failing to receive nourishment from the vision of God and spiritual values, the scientific man grows vain, proud, self-conceited and enthrones himself in the place of God. His scientific achievements go into his head; his vanity is pampered by the rabble. He boasts of the achievements of the scientific man which has enabled him to swim underneath the oceans like fishes in his submarines, diving tubes. He could fly through the air and reach the moon. His movies, T.V.s and radios! And his inter-continental ballistic missiles! His earth satellites and what not! Yet, he forgets that he is impotent to produce a blade of grass in his laboratory. Synthetic rubber is not the rubber which Mother Nature gives you. Can a scientist wipe out old age and death? If various kinds of physical diseases are fought against through prophylactic and curative medicine, we should remember that newer types of mental and spiritual diseases have come into existence with no hope of cure for them. The neolithic man, and even today the Nagas and Buthias in the foothills of the Himalayas hardly know of any neurotic and psychotic disorders which the modern man experiences in his offices, in his skyscrapers in New York, Chicago, London or Bombay.

There is only one way for health and happiness. That is dictated by Mother Nature herself who faithfully executes the will and laws which Father Heaven has engraved on her. The Ten Commandments and the Panchsila are not inventions of the Mosaic or Buddhist prophets. They are the quintessence of human ethics. Voluntary obedience to ethical laws is the *conditio sine qua non* for the health and happiness of man and mankind. They

are of universal value, for the easterners and westerners, the Buddhists, Hindus, Sikhs, Parsees, Jains and all alike.

The difference between monks and the laity is only functional, but not in the observance of the laws of Nature. Class distinctions exist in order to execute various functions of the civil and religious societies. The householder has a different field of work to perform from the monk, whose main duty is self-effort towards the highest possible Self-realisation and Self-realised dynamics in society. When we deflect or deviate from the focussing centre and integrating power within us—which is God or Dharma—then we fall to pieces. There results the disintegration of human personality. It is to cure man of these psychotic and spiritual maladies that monasticism exists. As C.G. Jung has repeatedly stated, in order to ensure the moral health of man, our age needs the co-operation of the psychologists, monks, priests and nuns whose main concern is the science of God and soul, whose chief efforts consist in making souls Dharma-guided and God-conscious.

We owe a duty to our youth. They should not be allowed to be left at the mercy of new-fangled ideas which rise and fall like waves on the sea. We need offer to our youth a ray of hope, a sure anchor, a raft of salvation from the conflicting ideologies that confuse their minds, weaken their will-power and land them in the hell of neuroses and desperation. All moral and ethical forces are to be mobilised in order to stem the tide of frustration and helplessness in the world. The forces of disintegration have all the scientific glamour and technological weapons at their disposal, the wireless, T.V., *secret services and open advertisements* to corrode and corrupt our youth. Yet, all these are mere size without substance, all noise without life. We are in duty bound to offer the olive branch

of peace, the assurance of joy, love and happiness to our youth in their sweet teens and youthful twenties. I believe, an objective study of monasticism at its best will be helpful to bestow that cheer and joy of life to our youth lost as holocaust in a fear-haunted, authority-ridden and war-smitten world.

There is also another reason that prompts me to write a book on monasticism in the Christian and Hindu-Buddhist world. A number of earnest, sincere, inquiring youths, boys and girls, in India and abroad, have sought my advice regarding their vocation in life. Some of them were hesitating between a householder's call or a monk's vocation. Others were not sure whether they should join a Hindu *math*, a Buddhist *vihara*, or any of the Christian religious orders. A small number of them thought of leading a monastic life, but by remaining independent.

My advice seemed to have helped some of them to discern and strengthen their vocation, as the Kindly Light, through the oracle of their own still silent inner voice, has shown them. Accordingly, some of my friends entered Christian cloisters; others the Hindu or Buddhist *ashrams* of their own choice. A few of them decided to live up to the monastic ideals, but remaining independent of any organised monasticism. Many others, to whom I advised to follow the path of an average man or woman in married state, have decided to settle down as householders.

I am not at all an authority on the subject. I have made no special research on the subject of vocation and monasticism. I, certainly, cannot claim any right for spiritual direction. But I can say that for the last three decades or more, from my latter teens until now, I have loved the monastic ideal; I have lived in Christian, Hindu and Buddhist monasteries; studied with them; prayed with them

and have tried my best to get at the esoteric of monasticism, to live it. Based on this experience, I have arrived at some definite conclusions. I have expressed them at random, in a few lectures, at the weekly Bombay Forum I was conducting, in some articles, personal talks and through correspondence. This book will be an attempt to systematise and summarise those thoughts with a view to helping kindred souls anywhere on this planet. To my fellow-tramps I am nothing more than a fellow-seeker for Light and Life, for fuller light and life.

In 1955, *Catholicus*, a monthly journal from Allahabad, published my *Home-Coming* series of six articles. The series, which aroused interest among its readers, had a bit of autobiographical flavour. Many requests reached me suggesting that I should produce an autobiography based upon that *Home-Coming* series of articles. I am not a superman. I believe, only a few supermen should write autobiographies. My life is not worth an autobiography. But God's life is. Dharma is. Hence to write a book on monasticism with a view to helping my fellow-tramps, aspirants to discover their own vocation falls within my Dominican vocation and mission.

As Mary Baker Eddy had said: "It is our ignorance of God, the Divine Principle which produces apparent discord, and the right understanding of Him restores harmony." (*Science and Health* p. 390)

Monasticism, in its wider sense, has its therapeutic value. Today we speak of hydrotherapy, heliotherapy, psychotherapy, physiotherapy, etc. But few realise that there is God-healing, which, for want of a better term, we may call Theotherapy. Even for health reasons and selfish motives, to unfold and pursue the monastic urge within us is paying.

Certainly, monasticism has nothing to do with renunciation of joys and pleasures and happiness of life. Nay, monasticism is the one supreme and royal path that points out the way to joy, pleasure and happiness; but real, true, lasting pleasures of the spirit. The happiness which monasticism offers is soul-deep and not skin-deep; it is substantial, not a sham shallow excitement. Monasticism means conquest of life-wisdom and sanctity far transcending the relative opposites like virtue and vice, good and evil. In this broader sense, Ram and Sita, even as royal couples, stand out as supreme patterns of monastic idealism in Hinduism. By nourishing and strengthening the monastic or God-urge in us, we wage war upon war, inflict death to death, sin and vice, eliminate those toxic and neuropathic lusts and emotions from our hearts, and uproot those sinful weeds which corrode our better self, dim the light of reason, weaken our will-power and make us so dissimilar to God in whose image appeared *homo sapiens* on this earth.

The bards of the Upanishads, propelled by the monastic urge from within, prayed to the Cosmic Soul, saying:

"Lead us from the unreal to the Real,
Lead us from darkness unto Light,
Lead us from death to immortality."

—*Brihad. Upanishad*

Out of the depths of his monastic soul, sang Francis of Assisi:

"Lord, make me an instrument of Thy peace!
Where there is hatred, let me sow love.
Where there is injury, pardon.
Where there is doubt, Faith.
Where there is despair, hope.
Where there is darkness, light.

O Divine Master, grant that I may not seek
so much to be consoled, as to console,

to be understood as to understand,
to be loved as to love:

- For it is in giving that we receive,
It is in pardoning that we are pardoned,
It is in dying that we are born to Eternal Life."

On the fulfilment of his monastic urge, Budd sang:

- "Many a house of life
Hath held me—seeking ever him who wrought
These prisons of the senses, sorrow-fraught;
Sore was my ceaseless strife!
But now,
Thou builder of this Tabernacle—Thou!
I know Thee! Never shalt Thou build again
These walls of pain,
Nor raise the roof-tree of deccits, nor lay
Fresh rafters on the clay;
Broken Thy house is, and the ridge-pole split!
Delusion fashioned it!
• Safe pass I thence—deliverance to obtain."

This song of liberation sung by Buddha, and so touchingly paraphrased by Edwin Arnold, is the universal song of all the genius monks and nuns who have gone all the way to Self-realisation, following the unerring God-instinct in man. This God of Dharma-urge, this monastic urge, has a twofold facet. The first is the core and kernel of it which consists in deep interior life, self-abidance and self-realisation. The second is its outward flow, its social content, its dynamic social action, its apostolic zeal for the uplift and welfare of others.

Deep interior life fills up the cup of knowledge, that *Jnana*, Gnosis that emancipates, that Love that is enkindled within, the two wings for us to soar to Good the Ultimate Reality. Through interior life we are linked up with the very life of God, the Ground of all the phenomenal universe and all the transient flux of beings therein.. Through active apostolate we pour out waters of Eternal Life to the hungry and thirsty on the earth who are groping in darkness. The

monks and nuns are seers who become the beacon light for others, channels of that Kindly Light leading us on amidst the encircling gloom. The monastic urge impels us to forge ahead helping ourselves and others to reach Home, that lies far away from the fleeting transient flux of phenomena and shadows, firmly rooted in the heart of Reality, the Absolute, Eternal Love, Dharma, God.

CHAPTER II

VOCATION

"It is no small matter to live in a monastery, or in a congregation, and to dwell therein without complaint and to persevere faithful till death."

—*Thomas A Kempis* (Imit. Book I, Ch. XVII)

"True sanyasis, those who are able to devote their minds constantly to God, are like bees, which alight only on flowers and sip their honey. Those who live in the world, in the midst of sex and gold, may direct their attention to God; but sometimes their minds dwell on sex and gold. They are like common flies, which alight on a piece of candy, then on a sore or filth. Always fix your mind on God. In the beginning you must struggle a little; later you will enjoy your pension." —*Sri Ramakrishna* (*Kṛtāmṛta*)

"Have you never heard it said by wanderers who were venerable, aged, your teachers and the teachers of your teachers about the ancient Arahants, Buddhas, and so forth who sought the remote and lonely recess of the forest, where noise, where sound there hardly is, where the breezes from the pastures blow, yet which were safely hidden from the eyes of men, meet for self-communion, even as I (Buddha) do now?"

—*Buddha* (*Digha Nikaya* III: 51)

"Monastic urge, in its broadest sense, is the same as the innate urge for spiritual perfection. Based on the forms which this urge takes, we may well keep in mind the following distinctions. Monastic urge, seeking expression and fulfilment, in complete isolation and solitude, away from the association of men and world, produces hermits and anchorites. Cenobitism is the fruit of the same monastic urge seeking fulfilment in a group of like-

minded aspirants. Both monks and hermits are the twin children of the monastic urge in man.

The broad Hindu monastic tradition is eremitic, since most of the Hindu monks—variously known as *sanyasins*, *yatis*, *sadhus*, *bhikus* and *yogins*—live and work as recluses. Individualistic life is the rule in Hindu monasticism, while in Buddhism and Christianity individualistic hermits, recluses and anchorites are exceptions rather than the rule. Both branches of monasticism have their common origin in the God or Self-realisation-urge in man; and both lead to the same goal, viz., Self-realisation, God-vision, *Nirvana* or *Mukti*.

John the Baptist, St Anthony of Egypt and St Paul the Hermit represent the Christian type of eremitic life. The Benedictines, the Carmelites, the Dominicans and others represent Christian monasticism in its cenobitic form. There are mixed types in the luxuriant growth of Christian monasticism as in the example of the Carthusians, Cistercians, Hermits of St Augustine, the Camaldolese, etc., who have their own individual hermitages, and yet, have some form of community life as well.

Christianity, specially the Catholic Christianity, is the most luxuriant, ever-green, ever-modern and perennial garden in which all conceivable forms of monastic institutions exist. There is a greater variety and richness in them compared to any other religion, including the Buddhist monastic institutions, which is the second largest and most organised monastic religion in the world.

We should also keep the distinction between monasticism and priesthood clear in our minds. Monasticism always remains the pathway leading its votaries to spiritual perfection, while priesthood is both the pathway towards perfection and it entails the duty and responsibility to lead others to the summits of spiritual perfection. Hence there

is the theological dictum that monasticism is *status perfectionis acquirendae*, the state of perfection to be acquired, while priesthood is the state of communicating perfection, *status perfectionis exercendae*. Priesthood, then, in its ideal sense, is a step beyond monasticism, in that the monks are called to become perfect themselves, while priests are to make others perfect. Since none can give others which he himself does not possess, it follows that priesthood means both spiritual perfection and spiritual ministry. It means filling the cup with waters of Eternal Life, and then make it overflow to quench the thirst after Truth and Righteousness in others. Monasticism is fire, priesthood is its flame. Monks are ardent, burning down their lower self in order to realise the Higher Self, while priests are—or should be zealous, glowing with the radiant saving grace to lift up as many as they can from the deluge of sin and vice, ignorance and death. A monk's ideal is *Arhatship* as in the Hinayana, while a priest's is *Bodhisattvahood* as in Mahayana Buddhism.

The distinction between monks and the laity is also to be kept in mind. The broad-based division in the West between the clergy and the laity has its counterpart in the Buddhist world in *Bhikus* and the lay people. In the Buddhist countries like Tibet, Burma, Ceylon and Thailand, the entire Buddhist population comprises of the *Sangha* and *Sravakas*, the Buddhist Order and the laity. The *Sangha* or the Buddhist Order comprises of ordained monks or *Bhikus*, *Sramaneras* or novices and junior monks, and *Staviras* or the members of the teaching order or *ecclesia docens*. In Jainism, more than in Buddhism, even the laity form part of the broad-based monastic ideal; because they also aspire towards spiritual perfection. The difference between monks and the laymen is in degree rather than in essence.

What is said of monks is valid, in its broadest

essentials, also for the nuns in Christianity and Buddhism. Nuns or *Sanyasinis* are exceptions in Hinduism, while the monastic vocation for women is most common in Christianity, Buddhism and Jainism.

Monastic life, in its eremitic, community or priestly form, presupposes a call or vocation to that state. The sense of vocation to the life of the Spirit is most conspicuous in Christianity and Buddhism.

At the age of fifteen I approached a saintly Malabar priest, the late Fr George Vakail, who happened to be the vicar in my parish church of Moorthadam. The conversation I then had gives us a picture of what vocation means.

Fr Vakail: "Well, my child, you say you want to become a priest. But have you vocation for that state?"

I replied: "I do not know. But I feel like joining a seminary, studying philosophy and theology and then becoming a priest like you."

Fr Vakail: "If you are called by God to become His minister, that is alright. But you must ascertain your vocation."

I asked him: "But how can I know that?"

Fr Vakail: "Well, you apply these tests to yourself, asking yourself these questions: 'Have I the aptitude to become a priest, those physical, mental, and spiritual qualities that will enable me to discharge my duties? Am I strongly attracted to priestly vocation? Will I be accepted by my ecclesiastical superiors?' If you can answer affirmatively all these three questions, then, be sure, you have vocation."

I replied: "The second question I can answer affirmatively. The first question I cannot answer, since I do not know what these qualifications are. Nor can I answer the third query, because I haven't as yet approached my superiors."

Fr Vakail: "Well, I can vouch for your aptitude, and you have your affirmative answer to the first question. But to the third, only the Archbishop could reply. So, you'd better send in the application to His Grace seeking admission in the seminary."

Subsequently, as was guided by Fr George Vakail, I wrote and sent my application to the Archbishop of Verapoly, the Rt Rev. Dr Angelo A. M. Perez, O.C.D.. I had then hardly appeared for my matriculation examination. One fine morning the news of a favourable reply from the Bishop reached me. That selection of candidates by the ecclesiastical authorities opened up for me the doors to priesthood and monasticism not only in Catholic Christianity, but, later on, also in the Hindu-Budhist world in the East.

Aptitude, attraction and episcopal or ecclesiastical or *Guru's* acceptance are generally considered to be the three signs of vocation to monastic and priestly life in the Christian world. With regard to the third requisite, viz., ecclesiastical approval, Branchereau, in his book on *Meditations for the Seminarists and Priests*, has this to say:

"The third mark is the call of our superiors, that is, the favourable judgment of the Bishop, whom God has given the mission and grace of discerning vocations, of sifting out the unworthy, and of opening the sanctuary to those whom he believes truly called. The Church has ever considered this control necessary; the right of admitting or rejecting those who present themselves to Holy Orders has always been attributed to the Chief Pastor. Without this sanction, all other marks of vocation, though apparently sure, ought to be regarded as illusions."

Besides the scriptural injunctions regarding the discernment of vocations, it has been my universal experience that when a young Hindu or Buddhist aspirant approaches any senior monk desiring to be

ordained as a monk, he must needs first be approved by his *guru*, or the initiating master.

Besides these three essential marks of vocation, so common in Christian and the Hindu-Buddhist religions, there are other qualities needed in candidates desiring to be ordained as monks, priests or nuns. Of these, the will and determination of the aspirant to pursue the footsteps of the founder of the religion of his choice is foremost. Thus a Christian priest or monk is expected to struggle hard to become as near a copy as he can of Jesus Christ. That is the reason why all young seminarists preparing themselves for priesthood, and all young novices and students preparing themselves to become monks, are given the ideal of a priest or monk as *alter-Christus*—another Christ—called to continue the ministry of Christ Himself in saving souls from the deluge of sin and vices.

Speaking of this trait, while discerning vocations, Cardinal Gibbons says:

"Our Saviour never sought to allure His disciples to the apostolate by setting before them the dignities, honours and temporal advantages that might be associated with their ministry. His practice was rather to inure them to its hardships by frequently representing to them the privations, the trials, and the sacrifices to be endured in His service...He revealed to Peter the martyrdom that was to crown his earthly labours (Jn. XVI: 18). Of Paul He said: 'I will show him how great things he must suffer for My name's sake' (Acts IX: 16). And the sons of Zebedee He gently weaned from their thirst for earthly distinction, which had marred their zeal for God's glory, by telling them that their mission was to suffer, and that they should partake of His chalice (Mat. XX: 23)."

—Gibbons, *The Ambassador of Christ*, Chapt. III

I consider this quotation worthwhile in order to understand all the better the tap root of Christian vocation. It is true that there are not a few who enter the precincts of a seminary or theological college or monastic cloister with worldly motives.

But, then, it is not the ideal, but the betrayal of the ideal of divine vocation that is to be blamed. While the majority, the vast majority, of monks and priests begin their vocational journey with the right motives of self-sanetification and salvation of others, those who persevere in that ideal of self-sacrifice and crucifixion of the flesh in order to win the palm of victory in the resurrection of the Spirit, are not many. The lure of an easy living, worldly honour and creature comforts slowly eat into the vitals of their early vocational sense and cool down their vocational urge. They become lukewarm and betray their vocation in the end.

Lofty vocations, not unfrequently, degenerate into lucrative jobs and professions. Priesthood and monasticism are no exceptions to this phenomenon so commonly observable in society. Vocation, essentially, is a clear call from God, Nature, to fulfil a certain mission in life, while profession is an avocation which one freely chooses as a means of livelihood. Priesthood or monasticism, as a vocation, is to continue the very life-mission of Christ or Buddha, while, as a profession, it becomes means to secure an easy comfortable living. In this sense, we often find people talking about "priestly profession" like any other profession, say the medical or legal profession. Yet, both priesthood and monasticism in its eremitic and cenobitic forms, has nothing to do with any profession whatsoever. It is essentially a vocation which *toto genere* differs from any profession.

Degeneration of monastic and priestly vocation into a money-making profession is, unfortunately, a common scene in all the monastic religions of the world. That is the reason why all the rules and constitutions of the religious orders insist in the strictest observance of the vows, which are the best safeguards and impregnable bulwarks for individual members to maintain their vocation pure,

and persevere in their high call to the end, without falling into lethargy, routine, indifference, lukewarmness and indolence. These are the great dangers for monks and priests to persevere in their vocation.

As we proceed further, we shall have occasions to contrast the ideal aspect of monasticism with what it is in actual life. Hence, it is necessary to bear in mind this distinction between monasticism as a vocation and as a profession. St Paul, by profession, was a tentmaker, while, by vocation, he became the foremost missionary and dynamic monk in Christendom. Asoka the Great was by profession an emperor, but by vocation a missionary of Buddhism and an ideal monk. Mahatma Gandhi was by profession a lawyer, but by vocation he is the "Father of Free India", and Indian Lincoln, a modern Socrates, a Hindu Francis of Assisi, all in one.

Vocation, then, implies a mission in life which an individual is called upon to fulfil, Destiny, *Dharma*. Vocation always springs from the summits of an idealist view of life, rooted in imponderable values. The masses, following the herd instinct, just run the ordinary course of mediocrity and imitation, conditioned by their economic and social environments. There are some who rise superior to the tiger and ape in them in their instincts. They struggle hard for emancipation to pursue the path of self-realisation. This is a spiritual adventure, a continuous walking on a razor edge barefooted, without either cutting the legs or toppling down into the abyss below. Mental discipline, ethical training and spiritual culture entail a much bigger feat than the most awe-inspiring and breath taking performances in a circus show. Here, brick by brick, one has to build up one's personality. Higher the spiritual stature, deeper will be the foundation. The more gigantic an oak tree, the de-

eper and stronger are its roots, which are hidden from the eyes of men. Yet, the roots sustain the whole visible tree up above. The spiritual nourishment of a monk is inwardliness, introspection, meditation, *sadhana*, self-discipline and self-control for self-realisation.

The real vocation to the higher life of the spirit, dawns only after one has experienced life in its objective reality and subjective experience. When I joined the seminary in 1931, at the age of fifteen, my sense of vocation was nothing but an immature, faint image of the real vocation which was discerned only later in life in my thirties. When in later life one is strengthened in the path he has chosen in his teens, without being diverted to other channels, his sense of vocation becomes confirmed. Then there is no more that split loyalty, that sense of dichotomy between what one feels to be one's vocation and one's profession. There is then inward unity and the path towards integration of personality becomes much easier.

But, sometimes, there is a clash between one's vocation and profession. Stronger minds, when facing the conflict between vocation and profession, stick to what they consider as their vocation, discarding their profession, however lucrative, pompous and attractive it might be. Mahatma Gandhi, after reading John Ruskin's *Unto This Last*, gave up his legal profession, although he was then earning over one thousand pounds annually by defending the cause of Indians against the colour-bar discrimination of the whites in South Africa. Gandhiji, heeding the still voice inside, pursued his vocation, and settled down in "Tolstoy Farm" overnight, calling himself a "farmer and weaver". He followed up his vocation in India, and he became the Mahatma, the Father of Free India.

The great Russian Tolstoy, after he reached the

zenith of literary fame, in his early fifties, suddenly abandoned his literary profession and pursued the vocation of a moral reformer and prophet. Leo Tolstoy, thereafter cared nothing for literary fame but dedicated the evening sunshine of his life solely and exclusively to his vocational work which he believed to be of an ethical and spiritual nature. In his *war and Peace* (1886) and *Anna Karenina* (1877) we find Tolstoy at his best in his professional triumph, while in his *True Life* and moral stories we find him pouring forth his vocational energy. The count who revelled in palaces, would now dress himself like a peasant, and run away from his mansions, and lie in an open field. His literary profession was replaced by his prophetic vocation.

This switch over from one's profession to one's true vocation is usually the result of what is generally known as conversion. Real conversion has little to do with re-labelling of individuals from one religious society into another. This type of missionary proselytism of persons from one religion to another has meaning only when it becomes the outward expression of an inner change, mental attitudes and ways of life. This latter change is the real conversion, the *metanoia* which results in the birth of a new vocational sense, and apostolic urge combined with an undying missionary zeal.

It is in this sense that Paul was converted to Christianity from Judaism. Standards of values and mental attitudes change thereby. The things and persons whom one formerly hated and fought against become the new objects of his love and service, while the things and persons he once hugged and fondled are rejected, jettisoned into the deep sea. Of Paul, Saul of Tarsus, we read:

"Saul, with every breath he drew, still threatened the disciples of the Lord with massacre; and now he went to the high priest and asked him for letters of commendation

to the synagogues at Damascus, so that he could arrest all those he found there, men and women, who belonged to the way, and bring them back to Jerusalem."—*Acts IX: 1, 2*

Jesus, once the object of his hatred, now becomes his Master and Saviour. Paul's former zeal for the Mosaic Law is now directed against it in support of the Christian concept of grace and salvation. There is conversion, *metanoia*, which, in its turn, engenders vocation.

St Augustine took to teaching rhetoric and philosophy as his profession. He revelled and rolled in amoral filth and dung, even when he thrived in intellectual achievements and literary career. Yet, his vocation was to become one of the most outstanding patriarchs of Christian monasticism, and perhaps the greatest thinker and doctor of Latin Christianity. This vocation dawned upon him at the age of thirty-three, when he finally decided to lead a life of self-restraint and self-purification to the extent of seeing God face to face. Vision of God is the blessedness granted and promised only to the pure in heart.

Vocation, then, is the discovery of one's true path in life. It follows certain mental and moral upheavals in the life of an individual, when permanent values begin to set in, after the white heat of adolescent adventures are over, and the mind of man seeks for those imponderables which give stability, integration, inner poise and power. The dawning of vocation may be a conscious re-discovery of the profession or vocation which one has been pursuing so far, or it may be a radical change from, and the parting of ways with, the old ways of life. In the New Testament the Greek word for conversion is *metanoia*, which literally means a change of mind, change of mental attitude towards life, its problems and values based on a new assessment of facts and experiences. This *metanoia*, in certain cases, brings

about a reversal of values and a veritable metamorphosis, more conspicuous and interesting than the emergence of butterflies from caterpillars. In the realm of psychology and social hygiene the transformation of a sinner into a saint, of an atheist to a theist, of a lustful loafer into a Self-realised ascetic is of absorbing interest.

Whatever may be the channel of one's vocational expression, whether in the field of missionary propaganda as most of the Buddhist, Hindu and Christian monks and nuns are engaged in, or in the field of literature or social dynamics, there are certain common essentials which link up all these converts, monks and nuns and laymen into one fold. There is a common urge for inner purification, a thorough cleansing of mind and heart from every trace of defilement and blemish which would enable them to glimpse into the very face of the Eternal, the Real, the Substantial. Their subsequent lives will substantiate the fact that purity, incontinent chastity, is all possible in life, that we can live and work in this world and yet not be of the world. The lotus plant is rooted in mud and thrives in muddy pools and ponds, and yet its leaves and flowers and fruits remain untouched by mud and water. In the depths of the sea live mother pearls, and yet they do not take a drop of sea water. There are flies called *pirastes* which can skilfully fly through fires and flames without burning or even hurting their wings. There are springs of fresh and pure water surging forth from the sea near the Chelidonian islands. Serious life is, then, a fact, and not merely a possibility in a world given to thoughtlessness and dissipation. Chastity is perfectly possible in a world given to debauchery and lasciviousness enhanced through modern technology and condoned or defended by pseudo-psycho-analysts.

Vocation to higher life, call to interior life and

God-realised dynamics in society, is heard by all self-possessed and reflecting minds at some stage or other in their lives. The call is there, but not always everybody responds; as in the words of Jesus, "Many are called, but few are chosen." This paucity of response to the call from the High to lead a divine life, to become supermen amidst men, lions amidst sheep, gods among men, is largely due to the opaqueness of the human mind and hardness of the human heart, both of which are usually the nemesis of sins.

In the stillness of mind, in moments of supreme introspective isolation, in that silent eloquent communion of soul with the Oversoul, of individualised spirit with the Universal Self are heard those celestial whisperings which, when continued to be heard uninterrupted in the sanctuary of the soul, become powerful promptings for man to progress in ethics and spirituality. There starts a period of self-enquiry and soul-analysis—which has little to do with Freudian psycho-analysis but much with the analytical psychology of C.G. Jung—which enables one to distinguish what is what, discriminate pleasure from happiness, that happiness which lies beyond the pale of sensual thrills. The ecstasy that often accompanies the vision of Truth is powerful enough to inspire and urge the patient—for a sinner is a diseased person—to give up his old ways and embark upon the new path of interior life.

Vocation to monasticism, then, is the same call to higher life of the spirit by climbing step by step the ladder of perfection of the realisation of the Higher Self in man. This one may achieve by accepting any of the existing religious orders, or by modifying them to suit the needs of the aspirant. One may also follow the eremitic path in silence and solitude, if that helps the growth of the individual. Man has not to subject *himself* to any monastic rule,

or constitution except insofar as that subjection or obedience helps him to grow from within. The Sabbath is for man, not man for the Sabbath.

In cases where vocation and profession are the same, there is hardly any conversion or *metanoia* needed. Thus Sankaracharya, one of the most outstanding monks in Hinduism, Bhodidharma in Buddhism, and St Thomas Aquinas in Christianity, stand out as specimen of life-long monks, who embraced the religious state in their teens, walked unswervingly along the monastic path to the full, reaching the summits of wisdom and sanctity, enlightening future generations of monks and thoughtful men and women in all climes, among all races. But these cases wherein the vocational urge coincides with their professional duties are much fewer compared to the overwhelming majority of men and women who need conversion, a *metanoia*, a spiritual re-birth and become twice-born through *Dharma*, God.

Vocation, then, generally speaking, presupposes a conversion; but not always conversion necessarily means monastic vocation, simply because monasticism is a further narrowing down of the broad-based call for conversion. Vocation to monastic life implies a certain degree of intensity, fervour, flavour of things divine, far above the mediocrity of an average good man in the world. It is an attempt, a life-long struggle, a discipline to cleanse one's soul of all its dross, discover pure gold without alloy—or, better, with as little alloy as possible—and live up to the councils of perfection with as little diluting and toning them down. Monasticism is the unreserved, total dedication of the whole man to God alone, to the cause of *Dharma* and Values alone. It is literally wedding of the soul with the Oversoul, of man with God, the nuptials of in-

dividualised self with the Cosmic Self, of one, with All, All-in-all.

Once, while living in a Buddhist monastery, a Tibetan Lama told me:

"*Lama*, is derived from two words: *La-ma*, which mean "superior one". Anyone wanting to become a *lama*, and join our monastic order must first see, whether he is called to be a *superior one*. If he is of the common mould, how can he be superior to them? First you should test your vocation by yourself, before the Order could test it through novitiate. What Buddha was, that all of us can. The seed of *Buddhi* is sown in all of us. Those who develop it can become *Bodhisatva*, and can free themselves and others. The rest will be carried away by the flood of *samsara*, the wheel of worldiness."

The Buddhist *stavaras*, elder *lamas*, *bonzes* and *Bhikus*, are on the look-out to find candidates whom they judge to be called for monastic life. The essential vows of monasticism, viz., voluntary poverty or non-possession and detachment, celibacy, or life-long purity, or sublimation of sex and obedience to the Rule, being the three universal vows in all forms of monasticism in Christianity, Buddhism, Hinduism, Jainism and other monastic religions, it follows that the differences lie more in the technique of application of these vows to individuals according to their historic, cultural, racial and psychological environments and needs, rather than in the monastic life itself.

In Hinduism also, as in all the organised monastic orders, vocation, as discerned by the *guru* or senior initiating monk, is the pre-requisite for any candidate to be admitted into the monastery. Outside of organised monasticism, there are too many cheats, bogus monks and rogues among the *sadhus* and *sanyasis* of Hindu India.

Nowadays, there is such an emphasis being laid on vocational schools for children. Earlier, the emphasis was on professional and trade schools.

The sense of vocation to be brought into schools, to industrial, commercial and craft schools has a spiritual basis in it. From vocational schools in our modern cities to monastic vocation there is a big gap. But vocation, if vocation, has the same basis, is of the same essence, viz: a call from God.

Strangely enough, many do champion the cause of vocational schools, under the garb of secularism, rationalism and Marxism decry of monastic vocation! I have myself joined the chorus of secularists and denounced monastic institutions, root and branch. Besides modern Luthers, there are many modern Stalins and Fuhrers and Duces who do not understand the mainspring of monasticism. They confiscate monasteries; these secularists insist on the monastics wearing secular dress! They charge monks and nuns of exploitation! A qualified lawyer may charge one hundred rupees for half an hour consultation on an ejectment suit, and some five thousand rupees to defend a case of the rich! If a dermatologist, bacteriologist and an M.B.B.S. and M.D. could charge a lump sum in four figures in order to take your sickness in his hand, how on earth the secularists and so-called rationalists and dialectical Marxian materialists could condemn religious organisations on a charge of exploitation, simply because these mighty historical religions have a few thousands have-nots enlisted in their army of monks and nuns? For the monks and nuns of Christian and the Hindu-Buddhist world possess nothing for themselves except the garment they wear and the mendicant's begging bowl. As Buddha, the prince among the mendicant monks, has said:

"The Bhikhu is satisfied with sufficient robes to cherish his body, with sufficient food to keep his stomach going. Whithersoever he may go forth, these he takes with him as he goes—just as a bird with his wings, O king, whithersoever

he may fly carries his wings with him as he flies. Thus is it, O king, that the Bhikhu becomes content."

—*Sammanaphala Suttanta*

The reservoir of ethical, moral and cultural energy is the monastic order in each religion. The monastics depend on society as little as possible for their basic essentials, such as food, clothing and shelter and some books. As St Paul said, "Having food and clothes to wear we are satisfied." Monks and nuns, from times immemorial have had as their principle and policy to depend least upon creature comforts so that they may become worthy tabernacles of the Creator. From God fall torrential monsoon rains of mental lights and moral virtues which beautify their souls.

The call of a monk is to remain steadfast in his choice, to abide with God and Values, displacing the dross and dirt from his mind and heart. A householder sometime may get glimpses of the Eternal; but he, at other times, may grovel and crawl in a stinking gutter. The monastic vocation is a one-way path, always moving steadily on to the target of his vocation, God-realisation. He is, as the parable of Ramakrishna has it, like a butterfly which would sit only on flowers and sip only its honey without injuring the flower. It will on no account condescend to fall into a gutter. Flies sit both on a sugar hill and on a dunghill or on filthy sores.

Vocation, based on the monastic urge in man, then, is a further step after the stage of conversion or *metanoia*. To become a Christian monk, a Buddhist or Hindu, is a further specification of vocation in general. Further ramification of vocational sense comes when one chooses this or that congregation, confraternity or religious order, or he founds his own. Whatever may be the path one pursues, whether oriental or occidental, theistic,

dharmic, or trinitarian or even agnostic or atheistic—although there is no real atheism since God is nothing but one of the hundred appellations for ontological Truth, self-subsisting Reality, Eternity behind time, Substance behind the shadow, the permanent *Néúmenon* behind the transient phenomena of life—the goal of monastic vocation is to climb as high as one can on to the pinnacles of perfection. To a Christian this goal is the God-realised life and the subsequent holiness and perfection of life, according to the injunction of Jesus, "Be ye perfect as your Heavenly Father is perfect." To a Buddhist, the same objective is expressed in different words, when he seeks after *Buddhi* or Enlightenment, of which the moral aspect is seen in the cultivation of virtues, according to the words of Buddha, "To cease from all evil, acquire all virtues and purification of the heart." Its gnostic aspect consists in the realisation of the truth: "All component things end in suffering, work out your salvation with diligence." What is not component in any sense can only be the Ultimate Reality, or God. In a philosophical vein, with acute ontological preciseness, Thomas Aquinas explains how God or Ultimate Reality alone has no composition within Itself. He says:

"That Being beyond all beings, having no composition of either quantitative parts of body, no composition of matter and form, substance and subsistence essence and existence, nor of the composition of genus and species and substance and accidents, is God." —*Summa*: I. Q. 3.

The Buddhist position of an "Unoriginated and Uncreated and Unformed Substance" wherein lies the hope of Self-realisation or Nirvana coincides with the philosophy of Christianity as expounded by Thomas Aquinas. But the angles of vision are different as also the expression translating that one, ineffable experience of saints of both the religions.

Whether in the realm of philosophy or religion, whether in the East or in the West, the vocation to higher spiritual life, the hieroglyphics of interior life, its experiences and expressions have much in common. Differences exist only on the surface. In Buddhism there is greater emphasis on the transient flux of the phenomena, on *anata*. In Christianity greater emphasis is given to the personal aspect of the Reality. In Hinduism more stress is laid on psychology, starting from the self of man ascending up to the Self of the Universe, discovered as ultimately one and the same. If a vedantist philosopher could say, "I am He"—So-ham—a Christian philosopher like Bonaventure would say, "God's centre is everywhere, his circumference nowhere." Yet the same truth is expressed differently by Heraclitus when he said, "You can never find out the boundaries of the soul, so deep are they." The soul without boundaries and the God without circumference is the same.

Vocation to a higher life may follow either the path of philosophic wisdom, that auto-redemptive gnosis, that path of knowledge, or *Jnana yoga* culminating in what the Christians call: "Beatific Vision", a Buddhist calls: "Nirvanic Bliss" and a Hindu calls: "*Videha Mukti*". Or the vocation may follow the path of devotional and emotional approach, the vocation to *Bhakti* or love. Men like Thomas Aquinas, Sankara, Ramanuja, Augustine, Plato, Plotinus, Marcus Aurelius, Seneca, Laotze pursued the path of knowledge, while saints like Francis of Assisi, Mira, Tulsi and Tukaram, Rabia of Hazra and Jallaludin Rumi and their likes followed the path of loving devotion. Yet, as heart and brains co-exist in the same individual, these differences between gnosis and love are not so rigid as not to overlap in the same individual. A cold logical mind like Thomas Aquinas may have occasional outbursts of devotion, producing lyrics

on Eucharistic Jesus, while a devotional saint like Rumi or Bonaventure may sporadically enter the sanctuary of metaphysics and ontology.

Yet, monastic vocation, in its broad outlines, aims at the same essentials, viz., self-knowledge, self-purification, self-control and subsequent Self-realisation, called God-vision in Christianity, Nirvana in Buddhism and Mukti in Hinduism. Names vary, but substance remains the self-same for all.

CHAPTER III

INITIATION

"I sleep, but my heart waketh; it is the voice of my beloved that knocketh saying: 'Open to me, my sister, my love, my dove, my undefiled; for my head is filled with dew, and my locks with the drops of night.' "

—*Song of Songs* V, 2.

"The face of Truth is hidden by a golden lid; that remove O Fostering Sun, for the Law of the Truth, for sight. O Sun, O sole Seer, marshal thy rays, gather them together—let me see of Thee, Thy happiest form of all; that Conscious Being everywhere, He am I."

—*Isa Upanishad* 15, 16.

"Be ye lamps unto yourselves. Be ye a refuge to yourselves. Betake yourself to no external refuge. Hold fast to the truth as a lamp. Hold fast as a refuge to the truth. Look not for refuge to any one besides yourselves "

—*Mahāparinirvāna Sutta*, II, 33

Initiation is the doorway for candidates having vocation to enter monastic life in any organised religious order, to undertake their pilgrimage towards Self-realisation, God-vision. The signs and symbols of initiation in Buddhism, Christianity and Hinduism are different; but their esoteric meaning is the same, viz., entry into the *sancta sanctorum* of Self-realised life.

As a student of the Buddhist way of *Nirvana*, and as a pilgrim to the Buddhist shrines in India, I happened to stay in the Buddhist monastery in Buddha Gaya, the thrice-holy spot of Buddhists where Prince Siddharta, twentyfive centuries ago, became the Enlightened One, the Buddha of this age. It was there that I first witnessed the initi-

ation ceremony of a young postulant who sought the yellow robes of the Buddhist order. The initiating priest was no less than Rev. Bhikshu Jagadish Kasyap, one of the most enlightened Indian Buddhist monks and a close friend and fellow-tramp of mine for the last two decades or so. The initiation ceremony may be reduced to the following:

(1) The change of secular dress by donning the yellow saffron robes of the monk is what is generally known as vestition. To a Buddhist monk three robes are given by the initiating priest. The monk usually gives up the name he had in the world and assumes a new name in the Order.

(2) Tonsure of the head in Buddhism consists of shaving off all hair from the head. A complete set of shaving materials such as razor, soap and toilet articles is then given to the initiated by the initiating priest.

(3) Offering of the begging bowl by the celebrating priest to the initiated means that henceforward he should literally become a mendicant disciple of Buddha, begging his morsel of food from door to door at the appointed time.

(4) The recitation of *Vandana* and *Trisharana* the taking of the five Buddhist vows or *Pancha Sila* together with the specific monastic vows completes the essentials of the initiation ceremony.

Vandana consists of repeating thrice the well-known Buddhist salutation which in Pali runs as follows:

"Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arhato Samma Sambuddhassa."

The English rendering of the *Vandana* is as follows:

"Homage to Him, the Blessed One, the Exalted One, the Fully Enlightened One.
To Him, the Holy One, the Exalted One, the Supremely Awakened One, Homage.
Honour to Him, the Exalted, Arhant Buddha Supreme."

The Trisharana or the Triple Buddhist Refugee is as follows:

"*Buddham Saranam gachami, Dhammam Saranam gachami, Sangham Saranam gachami.*"

Dutiyampi Buddham Saranam gachami.....etc.

Tatiyampi Buddham Saranam gachami.....etc.

Which means:

"I go to the Buddha as my Refuge; I go to the Dhamma as my Refuge; I go to the Sangha as my Refuge. For the second time I go to the Buddha as my Refuge. For the third time I go to the Buddha as my Refuge..."

After vestition and tonsure, the initiate repeats after the initiating *guru* the *Vandana*, *Trisharana* and the *Pancha Sila*. This latter constitutes the well-known five commandments of Buddhism which are binding on both the laity and the monastic order alike. The *Panch Sila* or the Five Precepts are as follows with their English translation:

- (1) *Panatipata Veramani Sikkhapadam samadiyami*
(I undertake to observe the precept of abstaining from injuring any of the living beings.)
- (2) *Adinnadana veramani sikkhapadam samadiyami*
(I undertake to observe the precept to abstain from taking things not given.)
- (3) *Kamesu Miccharara veramani sikkhapadam samadiyami*
(I undertake to observe the precept to abstain from all forms of sexual misconduct.)
- (4) *Musavada veramani sikkhapadam samadiyami*
(I undertake to observe the precept to abstain from falsehood in speech.)
- (5) *Sura-mera-majja-pamadatthana veramani sikkhapadam samadiyami*
(I undertake to observe the precept to abstain from intoxicating liquors which engender heedlessness.)

To these Five Precepts of Buddhist ethics, binding on all, are added the other five precepts which are taken by monks at the time of their initiation. The senior monk who gives initiation to candidates also administers the five precepts for monks, which are:

- (1) To use moderation in eating, and not to eat after noon.
- (2) To abstain from witnessing dancing, singing or theatrical performances.
- (3) Not to use garlands, perfumes, unguents, and ornaments.
- (4) To abstain from soft, luxurious and high beds and seats.
- (5) To abstain from accepting gifts in gold and silver.

In some Buddhist monasteries, specially of the Mahayana school, at the initiation ceremony, besides the above, there are heard texts from Buddhist scriptures sung by the assisting community of monks. Among the hymns chanted are the three salutations to *Buddha*, *Dhamma* and *Sangha*.

The Salutation to the Buddha runs as follows:

*"Itipso Bhagava-Arahan, Sammasambuddho,
Vijja--carana-sampanno, Sugato, Loka-vidu,
Annuttara Purisadamma Sarathi Sattha,
Deva-manussanam, Buddha Bhagava'ti."*

(Such indeed, is that Blessed One: Exalted, Omniscient, Endowed with knowledge and virtue. Auspicious, Knower of worlds, a Guide incomparable for the training of individuals, Teacher of gods and men, Enlightened and Holy.)

The Salutation to the *Dhamma* is as follows:

*"Svakkato Bhagavita Dhamma;
Sanditthiko akaliko;
Ehi-passiko opanayike;
Paccathan veditabbe vinnuhi'ti."*

(Well-expounded is the *Dhamma* by the Blessed One; to be Self-realised; with immediate fruit, to be approached, to be seen; capable of being entered upon, to be attained by the wise, each for himself.)

The Salutation to the *Sangha* is as follows:

*"Supatipanne-Bhagavato Savaka-sangho,
Ujupatipann Bhogavato savaka-sangho,
Naya-patipanno Bhagavato savaka-sangho,*

*Samici-patipanno Bhagavato savaka-sangho,
 Tadidan Cattari-purisa-yugani,
 Attha-purisa pugala, esa Bhagavato savaka-sangho,
 Ahuneyyo pahuneyyo, dakkhineyyo, anjalikaraniyo,
 Anuttaram punnak-khettan lokassa'ili."*

The English rendering of the above is as follows:

(Of good conduct is the Order of the Disciples of the Blessed One; of upright conduct is the Order of the Disciples of the Blessed One; of wise conduct is the Order of the Disciples of the Blessed One; of dutiful conduct is the Order of the Blessed One—namely those Four pairs of persons, the Eight kinds of Individuals—is worthy of offerings, is worthy of hospitality, is worthy of gifts, is worthy of reverential salutation, is an incomparable field of merit to the world.)

In Ceylon, Burma, Siam, Nepal, North Kashmir and other Buddhist countries, there are local variations; but the substance of the initiation ceremony is the same throughout the Buddhist world.

Then the usual offerings of flowers to Buddha takes place, usually before an image of Buddha, the initiate saying:

"This mass of flowers, fresh-hued, odorous and choice, I offer at the sacred lotus-like Feet of the Noble Sage. With divers flowers, the Buddha I adore, and through this merit may there be release. Even as these flowers must fade, so does my body march to a state of destruction."

Now the initiate gets up and joins the confraternity of monks. Now on he is a *Sramanera* or a novice, following the community life of monks, joining in their prayers, devotions, practices, studies and also going out for his daily round of alms. While in Theravada the general tendency is to adhere to the original Buddhism with as little admixture as possible with local traditions and cultures, in the Mahayana branch of Buddhism there exists a wide range of beliefs and practices. In Theravada Buddhism when an initiate takes his vows he never means them as a solemn promise made to God or

even to divinised Buddha. It is merely a firm resolve of his will to undertake to observe those precepts without any reference to God or divinised Buddha. But in Mahayana the initiation ceremony has many supplications and prayers. Dr Estlin Carpenter, in 1895, while delivering his Essex Hall lecture in London, quoted a Mahayana disciple, who was initiated into Dhamma, as praying to Buddha as follows:

"Whether I live in heaven or in hell, whether in the city of ghosts or of men, let my mind be fixed on thee: for there is no other happiness for me. Thou art my father, mother, brother, sister; thou art my fast friend in danger. O dear One, thou art my lord, my teacher, who imparts to me knowledge sweet as nectar. Thou art my wealth, my enjoyment, my pleasure, my affluence, my greatness, my reputation, my knowledge and my life. Thou art my all, O all-knowing Buddha."

These emotional outbursts of a Buddhist initiate in Mahayana have parallels in Catholic Christianity where mystics, saints and devotees have addressed substantially the same prayers to Lord Christ. The above Buddhist prayer, attributed to a Mahayana Buddhist initiate, is matched by several Catholic prayers. J. Estlin Carpenter, that stalwart English Unitarian who made significant contributions in bridging East and West on a religio-philosophical basis, quotes a fifteenth century prayer from Thomas A. Kempis to match the above-quoted Buddhist prayer of the eleventh century. A. Kempis prays:

"I had rather be poor for thee than rich without thee; I rather choose to be a pilgrim on earth with thee than without thee to possess heaven. Where thou art is heaven, and where thou art not there is death and hell.... O happy souls that have the privilege of receiving thee, their Lord God, with devout affection. O how great a Lord do they entertain, how great a guest do they harbour; how delightful a companion do they receive; how noble and lofty a spouse do they embrace. O thou, my most sweet, most be-

loved, let heaven and earth and all their ornaments be silent in thy presence."

St Augustine, St Bonaventure, St John of the Cross and other outstanding representative Catholic monks have much in common with the vision, emotions and religious expansionist idealism, which we come across in various Mahayana branches of Buddhism. And yet, Mahayana and Hinayana are not mutually exclusive of each other, but mutually integrative and complementary. They are the two sides of the same medal, the two great aspects or expressions of the boundless personality of Buddha, even as Catholicism and Protestantism, from a strictly mystical and religio-philosophical point of view, are the systole and diastole of the heartbeat of Christianity which flows from the personality of Jesus Christ.

In Christianity the initiation ceremony for monks—which is also true for nuns in both Catholic and Protestant worlds—may be reduced to the following:

(1) Religious vestition consists of exchanging the secular dress of the candidates with the specific religious uniform of the religious order, congregation or society which one enters. Both for the secular clergy and monastic members of monks and nuns, this change of dress is essential, an outward symbol of the inner change that should take place. The religious uniform or cassock which monks wear is symbolic of the cutting asunder of all the bonds that once tied them to the world, their family, social position, friends, relatives, etc., and the subsequent consecration of their entire personality to the religious ideal.

I myself had shared the joy of vestition ceremony twice, when first I joined the major seminary at Alwaye, in South India, on 22nd June, 1932. I received the clerical uniform from the late Fr John

Joseph, the then Rector of the Seminary, an ideal Carmelite monk and large-hearted spiritual guide to us all. Then, after I joined the Dominican Order in 1935, I had to change again my clerical soutane for the white and black uniform of the Order of Friars Preachers in which I was initiated on 6th October, 1935 at Pistoia, central Italy. Following the monastic custom, I changed my name from Anthony to Antoninus.

At all the initiation ceremonies, whether for the monastic life in monasteries or nunneries, or for the life of the secular clergy in seminaries, the initiating priest chants the well-known hymn to the Holy Spirit, which is later sung by the choir, the initiates and the entire congregation witnessing the vestition ceremony. The hymn which is sung in Latin is rendered into English as follows:

1. Come, Holy Ghost, send down those beams
Which sweetly flow in silent streams
From Thy bright throne above.
2. O, come, Thou Father of the poor,
O, come, Thou source of all our store,
Come fill our hearts with love.
3. O Thou of comforters the best,
O Thou the soul's delightful guest,
The pilgrim's sweet relief.
4. Rest art Thou in our toil, most sweet,
Refreshment in the noonday heat,
And solace in our grief.
5. O blessed Light of Life Thou art,
Fill with Thy Light the inmost hearts,
Of those that hope in Thee.
6. Without Thy Godhead nothing can
Have any price or worth in man,
Nothing can harmless be.
7. Lord, wash our sinful stains away,
Water from heaven our barren clay,
Our wounds and bruises heal.

8. To Thy sweet yoke our stiff necks bow,
Warm with Thy love our hearts of snow,
Our wandering feet recall.
9. Grant to Thy faithful, dearest Lord,
Whose only hope is in Thy word,
Thy sevenfold gift of grace.
10. Grant us in life Thy Grace, that we
In peace may die and ever be
In joy before Thy face.

This classical hymn of Christianity, this *Veni Sancte Spiritus*, when recited with due devotion, is believed to have power to open the doors and windows of soul to the floodlight of God, enabling us to understand God's will and strength to fulfil it, especially on the occasion when a candidate with vocation is to be initiated into monastic or clerical life.

(2) Tonsuring of the head is again a significant symbol in the initiation ceremony in Christian monasticism. The clerical tonsure is conferred by a Bishop, after whom the candidate says:

"Dominus pars, hereditatis meae, et calicis mei; ipse est qui restituet hereditatem meam mihi."

This may be paraphrased as follows:

"With the Lord I will share my inheritance and my chalice; it is He the Lord who restores unto me my inheritance."

Through the initiation ceremony the candidate abandons all earthly inheritance, worldly pomp, ties and pageantry, and he promises to embark upon a journey which will make him share the chalice and the bitter crosses of life so that he may inherit the Kingdom of Heaven in this life and hereafter through the grace and mercy of God, and through his own efforts and a strong, disciplined iron will.

Monks tonsure their heads in the form of a crown, leaving a circular form of hair, symbolising the crown of thorns which Jesus once bore prior to

his crucifixion. The religious tunic which monks and nuns wear also has its own symbolic meaning. For instance, the white tunic and the black mantle of a Dominican friar means lily-like purity and the spirit of mortification and austerity. Purity and discipline are the two wings, as it were, which enable the Dominican friars to soar to the pinnacles of wisdom and virtue, in order to become real preachers of God through a virtuous living and sound oral and written preaching of divine truths. The three knots which are found on the cord of a Franciscan friar are symbolic of the triple vows he takes in order to reach the goal of his monastic vocation. The change of name is symbolic of the complete break with the world, and of the determination to go all the way to perfection.

(3) At every initiation ceremony there will be an exhortation which the officiating priest gives to candidates standing or kneeling down for initiation. The superior, the Bishop or the officiating priest first reminds the candidates of their grace of vocation. Then he quotes suitable scriptural texts to make the young aspirants realise the full significance of the initiation ceremony they are about to receive. At my first initiation ceremony the officiating priest quoted the following:

"Hear ye, sons of Levi: Is it a small thing unto you, that the God of Israel hath spared you from all the people, and joined you to Himself, that you should serve Him in the service of the tabernacle, and should stand before the congregation of the people, and should minister unto Him?"

—Num. XVI, 8, 9.

"A priest is taken from among men, is ordained for men in the things that appertain to God, that he may offer up gifts and sacrifices for sins." —Hebrews V, 1.

Commenting upon these scriptural texts, Fr John Joseph, my initiating *guru*, said:

"What sacrifice will you offer to God? Nothing short of

your own self, including your mind, will and all other faculties and powers. It is in self-sacrifice that we find the key to self-resurrection. Crucifixion of the bodily man is essential for the resurrection of the spiritual man. Henceforward you should be able to say with St Paul, 'God forbid that I should make a display of anything, except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world stands crucified to me, and I to the world.' (Gal. VI, 14). Love of God should displace all other love from your hearts. Knowledge of God should be the goal of all your knowledge. In life and death, in health and sickness, in this life and hereafter may God alone be your love, dream, happiness and goal. May God bless you all to be faithful to your vocation."

These kinds of religious discourses and exhortations, which begin on the initiation day, will continue throughout the life of a seminarist or a scholastic, a monk or a nun under training. This practice of senior priests and monks exhorting the novices and juniors is a common practice in the Buddhist world as well. In Kalimpong, in the foothills of the Himalayas in the Darjeeling District of West Bengal, once I witnessed a senior monk exhorting the initiates who happened to belong to Tibetan Lamaist Buddhism. He began the exhortation and ended it with the same quotation from Dhammapada, saying:

"O Bhiku, empty this boat! If emptied, it will go quickly, having cut off passion and hatred, thou wilt go to Nirvana. Cut off the five fetters, leave the five, rise above the five. O Bhiku, who has escaped from the five fetters, he is called *Ogatinna*—'saved from the flood'. Meditate, O Bhiku, and be not heedless. Do not direct your thought to what gives pleasures, that thou mayest not for thy heedlessness have to swallow the iron ball in hell, and that thou mayest not cry out when burning, 'This is pain'. Without knowledge there is no meditation, without meditation there is no knowledge; be who has knowledge and meditation is near unto Nirvana." —*Dhammapada* XXV.

While in Buddhism and Christianity there is some kind of standardisation of the initiation cere-

mony and well-fixed regulations for the sacerdotal and monastic ordination, in Hinduism there is a wide range of variety and freedom. Sometimes a disciple is initiated by his master by just giving him one *mantram*—a short mystical aphorism like 'soham' (I am that Brahman), or *Tatvamasi* (Thou art that Absolute) or *Atmano mokshartham, jagat hit-ayacha* (work for the emancipation of your soul and for the welfare of mankind), etc. The initiation ceremony in Hinduism is known as *Diksha*.

Wise spiritual masters in Hinduism do not so easily initiate candidates approaching them for initiation. They take time, study their disciples and only when they are sure of their vocation, the master gives his disciple the *diksha*, by reciting Vedic prayers, or by giving him any *mantram* he chooses. The orthodox way of initiating candidates takes place facing the sacrificial fire burning in front of the initiates with the chanting of the Vedic hymns symbolising the renunciation of bodily pleasures and earthly belongings, all consigned to fire, and heralding the advent of the new life of the spirit. Swami Vivekananda and other disciples of Sri Ramakrishna were initiated in this way, according to the strict Vedic rites and ceremonies. Vivekananda is the name young Narendra Dutt assumed after his initiation. —

But, spiritual initiation of young Narendra—long before he was known to the world as Swami Vivekananda—had already taken place when Ramakrishna, at the mere touch, communicated to his beloved disciple spiritual powers even to the point of reaching ecstasy, or *samadhi*. This way of initiation by the unconventional and yet mystical touch of Ramakrishna is narrated vividly both in the *Gospel of Ramakrishna* and in the lectures of Vivekananda, especially the one entitled 'My Master' which he delivered in New York. The Ramakri-

shna Mission Order of monks, the only well-organised and cultured Hindu monastic order in India today, adheres to the orthodox way of initiation which includes recitation of the Vedic hymns, tonsuring of the head clean shaved, donning of the saffron robes with a begging bowl and staff as the only earthly possessions. In Hinduism there are many cheats, disguised rogues, roaming about throughout the country as *sanyasins* without any Vedic or spiritual initiation whatsoever.

The selection of texts from scriptural and theological authorities depends entirely on the will and discretion of the initiator who, by the very act of initiating, becomes the spiritual guide, the *Guru*, of the initiated. Theravada Buddhism, which is nearer the original teachings of Buddha, presents the doctrinal tenets, especially the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path, as the guide and master the *guru* and the "Master of Novices" for the initiate. This, however, does not exclude the acceptance of an ideal monk as the guide and exemplary pattern. Buddhism of all Hinayana trends hinge the auto-redemptive character of their teachings on the words of Buddha, who, just before passing away, said:

"Therefore, Ananda, be ye islands unto yourselves. Take the Self as your refuge. Take yourself to no external refuge. Hold fast to the Dhamma as an island. Hold fast as a refuge to the truth. Look not for refuge to anyone besides yourselves...And whosoever, Ananda, shall take the Self as an island, taking themselves to no external refuge, but holding fast to Truth as their refuge, it is they, Ananda, who shall reach the very topmost height—but they must be anxious to learn."

These great words of Buddha, which at once are auto-redemptive and gnostic, leave, however, doors for learners to look to Bhikus and the Dhamma, to monks and doctrine for guidance. A Lamaist Tibetan monk who instructed me about their posit-

tion, up in the foothills of the Himalayas, told me that I should first believe him before I could see the face of Buddha. This pedagogic and pastoral sense of the Mahayana Buddhists is closely akin to the orthodox Hindu and Christian position that we have first to believe the *guru* or the master of novices, the spiritual director before we attempt at walking alone along the path. Broadly speaking, this position is true, in the sense that a blind man should first trust the lead of a seeing man, that a child should first believe his parents or teachers before he could start his independent search and research. A Latin proverb has it, *Addiscentem oportet credere*—we must needs first believe in our teachers. Aristotle substantiated this pragmatic and positivistic method on the ground that faith precedes rational inquiry, as sense perception precedes intellectual understanding.

It can, therefore, be laid down as a general rule that the initiates have to enter the door of spiritual life and then proceed along the path of interior life for a long way under the guidance of a teacher, master or *guru* until they could arrive at the stage of discrimination and Self-realised lights. In Hinduism there exists the unbroken and closest link between the initiator and the initiated. Immediately after the initiation ceremony, which in Hinduism is performed in front of a burning fire with the recital of Vedic hymns and Upanishadic chants, the disciple offers a gift to his *Guru*, which may be a few coins, cloths or fruits, which symbolise the ideal that the disciple undertakes to attend to the spiritual and material needs of his master, from whom he expects to see the path leading up to Brahman, and lead a God-guided life.

Initiation means only the ceremony or symbolic acts and prayers which is the first step in the long and arduous path to spiritual perfection. The can-

didates may retain a raw, unregenerate and sinful bent for long months or years. But the first step is taken, the will is surrendered to the direction of a master, the choice is made and the candidate is just on his way to God-realisation. With the initiation comes that seriousness of life, that one-pointedness of mind and heart, that steel-framed discipline, which are essential for us to arrive at discrimination between body and soul, soul and the Over-soul, Reality and appearance, Freedom and bondage. The starting point in this discovery is just a zero, or next to zero. It is like the small tender coconuts on the palm tree. There is as yet no kernel at all. At the initial stage there are only tender fibres and water. Yet, potentially, there is kernel there, even as a tree is there, potentially, in a tiny seed. As a tender coconut grows and matures, there appears a thin white layer of kernel, which begins to grow thicker and thicker inside the shell which also begins to harden with time. When a mature coconut is removed from the palm tree and then husked and allowed to ripen and dry, there comes a certain stage when the kernel separates itself from the hard shell, so that if you shook the coconut, you could hear the kernel moving inside.

Something similar happens with the soul of man. As children, our life is hardly anything more than vegetative and biological. It takes time for the child to grow into a boy, and then into a mature man and see various stages of the development of the psyche, passing from the vegetative to sensitive life, from the sensitive to sexual life with the dawn of puberty, and from sexual life to greater sobriety and seriousness of life with the dawn of maturity in him. Soul begins to develop; yet, like a tender coconut, the soul sticks to the body, as it were, and the living body is believed to be his ego. It is only when the sense of discrimination dawns that he be-

gins to realise that his ego, his true ego, is neither his body, senses, sex, imagination or even his phenomenal mind and will.

The initiation ceremony is an undertaking on the part of the aspirant to meditate and struggle on for the realisation of his True Self which, although imprisoned within an individualised bodily frame, is not that body. Even though the onslaughts of passions and emotions continue to rage wild in him, yet, the ego islet stands as a firm rock that is not hit or hurt by passions, because ego is then identified with the Real Self and not with the passing phases of mortal body and bodily psyche. It needs long, persevering discipline and discursive and intuitive thought before we could raise our consciousness to supernatural heights as to be able to identify ourselves with the Real. To the Christian concept of "I and my Father are one", stands parallel the Hindu *Soham*—"I am He, I am That", *Tatvamasi*—"Thou art That" and *Aham Brahmasmi*—"I am Brahman". To lower levels of dualistic consciousness, from the point of a simple theistic faith where there still exists I and Thou relationship between man and God, the above statement appears to be blasphemous, but for mystics and highest order of contemplatives to realise the deepest in their soul is to return to its source and abiding there firm they say, "I am the child of God, of His very essence." The orthodox theological opposition to monism could be thwarted by stating that divine grace itself is defined as participation of the divine nature in the human soul. But the participant and the participation must be of the same category. The Pauline quotation from *Aratus: Genus Dei Sumus*—of God's kind we are—can have no other meaning except that the very divine nature is realised by beatified Self-realised souls.

Tapping at the very source of Life Eternal by

becoming and living in tune with the Infinite is in itself the pathway towards Self-realisation. As huge forests up in the hills are but the release of the locked up energy of one acorn, so the self-luminous knowledge of all things springs from the knowledge of the Self—the lower individualised self leading us up to the Higher Self, and the Higher Self lighting up the nature of the lower self. These are two sanctuaries of the same temple of God, two sides of a medal, two aspects of the same Reality. Catherine of Siena, one of the outstanding exponents of Self-realisation through self-knowledge says:

"Build yourself a spiritual cell, which you can always take with you; and that is the cell of self-knowledge; there you will find the knowledge of God's goodness to you. There are really two cells in one, and if you live in the one you must also live in the other, otherwise the soul will either despair or become presumptuous. If you dwelt in self-knowledge alone, you would despair, if you dwelt in the knowledge of God alone, you would be tempted to presumption. One must go with the other and thus you will reach perfection."

This is the correct picture of human frailty on the one side, and of divine grandeur on the other. Christian religion and all the Semitic religions are positivistic, empirical, relying on God's grace for salvation, while the Aryan group of religions, notably Buddhism of the Hinayana School and the Vedanta and Yoga schools in Hinduism lead their votaries and novices through self-knowledge and self-effort almost to the point of eclipsing or denying God's grace.

"If thou wilt, indeed, be wise, note the following: Sink your senses in the mind, sink your mind in intuitive understanding, sink your understanding in the *Atman*, the Soul Divine, and sink your Soul Divine into the Universal Cosmic Spirit." —*Katopanishad*

The auto-redemptive and self-confident attitude of Buddhism towards the all important pro-

blems of Self-realisation is expressed by Buddha when he said:

"By oneself is evil done; by oneself one suffers; by oneself is left evil undone; by oneself one is purified. Purity and impurity belong to oneself; no one can purify another."

Initiation is the entrance ceremony to enter the Path of purity, of holiness, of sanctity and the ideal of Self-realisation and God-consciousness.

CHAPTER IV

NOVITIATE

"They climb Indra like a ladder. As one mounts peak after peak, there becomes clear the much that has still to be done. Indra brings consciousness of That (Supreme Being—Thought—Love—Bliss) as the goal."

—*Rig Veda* I: X, 1, 2

"Now this is what I say to you, Nigroda: 'Let any intelligent man come to me, any man who is without guile, not a deceiver, but an upright man, I will teach him, I will show him the Dhamma. And if he practices according to my instruction....he shall realise for himself that unsurpassed holy life.'"

—*Diga Nikaya* III. 56

"Heaven-born, the soul a heaven ward course must hold.
Beyond the visible world she soars to seek
(For what delights the sense is false and weak)
Ideal form, the universal mould.
The wise man, I affirm, can find no rest
In that which perishes; nor will he lend
His heart to aught that doth on time depend."

—*Michael Angelo*

Monastic life is something like a ladder which one has to climb step by step. It is a graded course of training and discipline with a view to helping the candidates, having a vocation to lead spiritual life in its fulness, to grow in holiness, wisdom and character. Monasticism is a life-long discipline. But its foundation is laid during the novitiate, which is the period immediately following the ceremony of initiation.

Novitiate, in some form or other, exists in all organised forms of monasticism in Catholic, Hindu, Buddhist or Jain communities. In Catholic Chri-

stianity, because of its organisation and centralisation, we have the most disciplined and classical form of novitiate.

In monasticism, generally speaking, there are two distinct phases of the same quest after spiritual perfection. The first is philosophical, speculative, gnostic. It aims at understanding the universe, himself as part of it, and establishes his relationship with the cosmos, finds the vital link between the soul and the Over-soul, of the lower self with the Real Self. The second phase is intensely practical, ethical, moral, mystical. It seeks nearness, oneness and final identification of the self with the Real Self, of soul with God, of man with *Dharma*.

Vocation to higher life of the Spirit is meant for the few elect. That is the reason why the mysteries and truths of religious confraternities and associations have been kept closed secrets to the outside world. Deeper mysteries of higher spiritual life are meant for the select few initiates. The common people have their exoteric; the initiates have their esoteric, the inner kernel of religion.

Novitiate is the first step forward which a candidate having clear signs of vocation takes in order to embark upon the Path. Few are those who are serious about leading spiritual life; fewer still are those who dare to embark upon the thorny, narrow path leading up to the crucifixion of the *homo sapiens* and his final resurrection. The novitiate leads the initiate into the first secret chamber of celestial mansions in religious life. Novitiate is the first love-making with esoteric wisdom.

To the votaries of esoteric wisdom Pythagoras said, "Walk not on the public roads." To those aspiring after spiritual perfection Jesus said, "Enter ye in at the strait gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction, for many there be that go thereat" (Mat. VII, 13). To the

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initiates entering the precincts of the sanctuary of the soul were addressed these words:

"Seest thou not a certain small door and a certain road in front of the door, which is not much crowded, where only few are passing along, as it seems to be precipitous, rough and craggy?" —*Cebes. Tab. lin. 270.*

Novitiate is the prescribed period of ordeals and probation when the initiate, the neophyte makes a trial of the sort of life he is going to embrace for life. The novice makes an honest trial of the religious Order, and the Order, in its turn, makes a trial of the novice in order to see whether he or she could be definitely admitted into the type of monastic life the rules and constitutions of the Order envisage. Novitiate is a kind of engagement, betrothal between the novice and the Order in order to know each other better with a view to marrying for life, if found fit.

Christianity, more than any other monastic religion, has outlined in detail the nature, discipline and objectives of the novitiate. The mystery religions of pre-Christian Greece, the Orphic, Phrygian-Subazian and Eleusinian esoteric cults demanded a period of probation and preparation from all aspirants to be admitted into the inner circle. They had to take the vows of chastity, vegetarianism and several rules of discipline they had to observe. Only those who successfully stood the test were admitted to the inner circle of the professed members of the community. This kind of novitiate, in various forms, existed in the monastic communities of the Essenes of Palestine, among the Therapeutae of the Lake Maöris, in the ancient Egyptian mystery religions, as revealed from the *Book of the Dead*, among the Pythagorians and the Neo-Pythagorians, the Platonists and the Neo-Platonists, the disciples of Plotinus and Philo, the Sufis of Persia, and in other esoteric religious organisations. But, more

than these esoteric cults, it is Christianity, Buddhism and Jainism that gave the definite imprint of novitiate in the monastic life of their respective religious orders.

As Catholicism is the most organised monastic religion of the world with a variety of hundreds of monastic orders for both monks and nuns, the following regulations regarding the novitiate will be found helpful for both students and savants alike.

Generally speaking, there is a period, usually lasting for six months, during which the candidates to be initiated into religious vocation have to undergo a kind of pre-novitiate trial. This is called the postulant stage. The one who seeks admission into a religious community, even prior to the novitiate, has to stand the trial period of six months—which may be extended to another six months (Canon Law 539-2). This is a kind of pre-novitiate probation period. Only those who successfully have passed their pre-novitiate trials are admitted into the novitiate proper. Postulancy is the anti-chamber before the novitiate. The postulants wear a special uniform; they cut their hair short, observe the rules of silence and strict monastic discipline. They dispose of their private possessions and belongings so that they may be found entirely free of worldly entanglements and acquisitiveness prior to their starting the novitiate.

In Catholicism any one aspiring after religious perfection has hundreds of monastic and quasi-monastic societies to choose from. No religion in the world has such a rich variety of vocational monastic paths for both men and women that can suit any given temperament, need or urge of any individual as the Catholic Church. For me it took full one year of studious research into the ideals of various religious orders in order to choose the Dominican Order as my spiritual family. Although I

was trained in Alwaye Seminary for three years by the Carmelite monks, that Order did not grip me. Nor did the Jesuit Order engaged in various educational and missionary enterprises in India suit my spiritual urge. As from among hundreds of youthful, beautiful maidens that come in one's way the idealist lover chooses just one for his bride for life, so the Dominican Order was my first love in life and I know it will be my last love in life too. The intellectual lights of that Order like Thomas Aquinas, Albert the Great, Meister Eckhart, Tauler, Catherine of Siena, etc., its mystic firebrands like Savanarola, Giordano Bruno and Campanella, its artists and thinkers have all attracted me to its cloisters.

To the application I sent to the Roman Provincial, backed by all the canonical and academic testimonials, the late Fr Mariano Cordovani, who helped me sympathetically and accepted me into the Order, wrote to me:

"Now that we are sure that God calls you to our Order, come out from India to Italy to start your novitiate with a joyous and generous heart. Your dream to become a Dominican will become now a reality. We have full faith that one day you will become a full-fledged Dominican, ready to fulfil the Dominican vocational mission in India, your own Motherland. Be a child of our Father St Dominic, and may God bless you to be faithful to your vocation!"

On reaching Rome in early July, I was sent to the novitiate house at St Dominic's priory in Pistoia, near Florence. From July till October 6th I spent nearly three months as a postulant, which is the anti-chamber to formal novitiate. On October 6th I was initiated into the Order; my clerical dress was exchanged for the uniform of the Dominican Order and my name was changed from Anthony to Antoninus, after St Antoninus, a Dominican Saint who died as the Bishop of Florence. Although experiences of individual novices may vary, speaking for

myself, that one year of novitiate was the happiest, the most innocent and purest period of my life on this earth.

Each novice was given a cell in which the only furniture were a chair, a writing table, a book shelf with a few books, a kneeler and a crucifix hanging on the wall. The bed was soft on a spring cot with enough blankets for winter blizzards. The windows of the cells of novices were screened off from the world outside with thick glass. Each cell was meant to be a world of its own, completely cut off from the outside world except for a few visits, daily evening walks along the streets of Pistoia and correspondence. All letters going out and coming in are to be opened and censored by the novice master. The Dominican uniform, the white tunic, scapular and hood reminded the novice of its symbolic meaning which is lily-white purity and crystal-clear intellect. His black mantle reminded him of the spirit of renunciation, specially the inward detachment from the things of the world. Dante Alighieri interpreted the Dominican uniform as the symbol of princely beauty and spiritual grandeur.

What is still more significant is the voice of silence in the cell. The bustle and confusion in the outside world is replaced by the calm and joys of the inner world, the world of the spirit. There is now begun that silent quest after inner Reality, growing introspection and an intense search and research for God and soul. The novices, under the wise guidance of a novice master, will soon form habits of philosophic reflection. What Plato wrote about philosophers is true of these novices. He said:

"How think you are great and perfect philosophers formed? How do they occupy their minds? What are their thoughts, their aspirations? Listen, I will tell you. They know not the way to the Public Square or the palace. Nei-

ther do they know where the Council Chamber is or other-places in which public assemblies are held. They are never at pains to find out who will be promoted to this dignity or that employment, or who will receive the suffrages of the people and become popular idols. They are ignorant, and wish to be ignorant of the news of cities. They avoid banquets, clubs and reunions. Their bodies alone dwell in cities while their souls, spurning the things about them as unworthy of them and freeing themselves from all impediments, go forth from their prison unhampered and joyous to seek out and contemplate great and sublime truths."

This Platonic description of philosophers-in-making is literally of monks-in-making in Catholic, Buddhist and Hindu monasteries. The discipline which they begin in their novitiate will be continued even after their profession and ordination, an unending pilgrimage of the soul to see, reach, relish and realise Infinity.

Looking back with philosophic calm and dispassionate judgment to my one year of novitiate and the three decades of monastic life that followed it I can say without hesitation to all young men and women who aspire after higher life of the spirit, who are not satisfied with mere amassing gold and indulging in sexual passions, even under the glamorous decoying of romantic ecstasy, who have experienced for themselves the ephemeral nature of everything worldly and the more stable and truer and more lasting nature of happiness that springs from intellectual, mental and spiritual powers of man, to make an honest attempt to find avenues of self-expression and self-unfoldment in any one of the hundreds of religious and monastic organisations of the world. Novitiate will give them a trial period which will open up the vast doors of vaster horizons in the realm of adventurers of the spirit.

Monasticism, Christian, Hindu or Buddhist, is the peak of the spiritual perfection envisaged by

the religious organisations. Buddhism and Catholicism are the two foremost religions with most powerful monastic organisations. Of these two religions, Catholicism has no peer in history, psychology and mysticism in that rich and variegated forms of monastic and religious organisations for monks and nuns, lay men and women, with capacity to suit a thousand and one psychological types and spiritual urges.

It sometimes happens that the novice master or the spiritual director lacks that adjustability and freedom of the spirit—as opposed to the slavery of the letter—which comes in the way of freer growth of novices and of the professed. A founder of any new religious congregation has the vital experience behind him, that creativity and spontaneity and adjustability as a result of his spiritual experiences and religious Odysseys. But the stereotyped officials, oftener than not, cling to the letter of the rules and constitutions which were once inspired by a founder and enhanced by his successors, but have now lost contact with the inner esoteric of that religious movement. It is then that the creative souls suffer martyrdom, inner calvary which, if faced courageously, is bound to result in the triumph of the resurrection of the original spirit of the founder or in the renovation of the perennial spirit of monasticism.

I have known not one or two but literally hundreds of monks who have confided to me that their first years of religious life were the best, when they were innocent, spiritually uplifted and at times transported to empyreal heavens of the spirit, those ethereal and ineffable heights of spiritual consciousness which have bestowed upon them glimpses into the Infinite. Being participants of the very nature of God through grace, it is within the range of comprehension how man could see God, touch the Ab-

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solate, relish the Eternal and beat in unison with the throbbings of the Cosmic Spirit. Many a monk, in the early years of idealistic enthusiasm, when they courted sufferings and crosses for the sake of Higher Life, have heard the music of Heaven, the lyric of Love Divine, the ecstasy of the union of the soul with the Over-soul. They could sing with Tukaram:

"The unstruck drum of Eternity is sounded within me;
but my deaf ears cannot hear it.
So long as the man clamours for the I and mine,
his works are as nought:
When all the love of 'I' and 'mine' is dead, then the work
of the Lord is done.
The self within me is dead,
And Thou God enthroned in its stead.
Yea, this, I, Tuka, testify,
No longer here is 'me' and 'mine'."

—*Abhangs of Tukaram*

Or with Sankara:

"I, like the boundless ether, permeate,
The universe within, without, abiding
Always, for ever similar in all,
Perfect, immovable, without lustful desires,
Existence, knowledge, undivided bliss,
Without a second, One, supreme am I.
The perfect consciousness that 'I am Brahma'
Removes the false appearance projected
By ignorance, just as elixir, sickness.
The universal soul knows no distinction
Of knower, knowledge, object known."

—*Atma Bhoda*

Or with Baba Kuhl:

"In the market, in the cloister—only God I saw,
In the valley and on the mountain—only God I saw.
Him have I seen beside me oft in tribulation;
In favour and in fortune—only God I saw.
In prayer and fasting, in praise and contemplation,
In the religion of the prophet—only God I saw.
Neither soul nor body, accident nor substance,
Qualities nor causes—only God I saw.
I opened my eyes and by the light of His face around me

In all the eye discovered—only God I saw.
 Like a candle I was melting in His fire,
 Amidst the flames or flashing—only 'God I saw.
 Myself with mine own eyes I saw most clearly,
 But when I looked with God's eyes—only God I saw.
 I passed away into nothingness, I vanished,
 And lo, I was the all-pervading—only God I saw."

—*Prof. R.A. Nicholson's translation*

Such and similar to these are the lyrics and ecstatic songs of all those who have entered the path. All novices, who have genuine vocation, have experienced their heaven on earth during their novitiate. The whole life is regulated with the ringing of the bell or a gong, from 5 a.m. to 10.30 or 11 p.m. There is both community life and individual life, there is community life in the choir, church, school, refectory, playground, recreation, classes, libraries and in the other common practices. One feels like having grown into a bigger self by losing oneself in the life of the community. This is not merely herd instinct even in its sublimated form. It is enlightened life of individuals expanding, as it were, into the collective life of the community. The creative conscious and unconscious inter-action between the individual and the community is well marked and imprinted in the life of a monk, balancing his community-life with his individualistic life.

A monk's real self is found in his monastic cell when he is alone and leads his individual life. Cell life is heaven to a good monk, while it becomes an unbearable hell for a bad religious who has no real vocation, or who has lost monastic flavour and ideals. What a monk is in his cell, that is what he exhibits in his community life, in his social behaviour, in his ministry in the society. That innermost secret self of his will unfolds itself, in spite of himself, in due course.

Most of the time of a monk in his cell, whether he be a novice or a professed monk, a seminarist or

a priest, a friar or lay brother, is spent in study, meditation, vocal prayers and various mental, ethical and spiritual exercises and practices.

In that sweet, silent cell, cut off from all intercourse with the outside world, screened off from the tumult, bustle and confusion of the rabble and market life, the novice learns the secret of happiness in silence and solitude, in God and self, in *Dharma* and ethics, in discipline and contemplative meditation. As the flies rush headlong into the fire when they see light, so an energetic, idealistic monk rushes into the realm of Light and Life, and there his individual ephemeral self fades away and dies, and out of that death of his little self, he realises his deepest Self, his Lord and God wherein to abide is bliss, which superconscious state to reach is *Nirvana*.

As out of an amorphous rough marble, a Michael Angelo, through patient and painstaking chiselling and polishing brings forth the statue of a Moses or Christ—statues which still bespeak of the power of the creative mind and imaginative heart of an artist—so a conscientious and wise novice master corrects, admonishes, approves or disapproves his novices, watches them with maternal diligence and provides for them with paternal care so that the novices committed to his care may be tested, helped, formed, shaped, moulded and guided so that each of them may, in due course, become as many lights in the world, perfect images of Christ on earth. Similarly is the pedagogic mission of a Buddhist Bhikhu, or Hindu Guru for the novices in Buddhism and Hinduism.

Novitiate may be extended from one year to two years in some religious orders, or even more. But the foundation of the religious life is to be solidly laid during this period. It is the super-structure that rises after their novitiate that matters, a super-structure which, unlike the New York skyscrapers, can

be built higher and higher as long as we remain pilgrims on this earth. This is because of the fact that spiritual perfection, having the Infinite as its objective, is ever on the march to reach nearer and nearer the goal. In spiritual quest we can never say, "I have reached the goal; I have nothing more to strive for." There is no "thus far and no further" in spiritual life which is a spiritual adventure—an unceasing march towards God's summits of perfection. As the far horizon apparently touching the sea recedes farther and farther away from a sailor sailing in the sea, so our spiritual ideals begin to grow ever wider and fresher as we forge ahead with energy, diligence and determination to reach the impossible, impossible made possible through self-effort, divine grace or both.

In most of the novitiate houses, it is part of the general discipline that the novices should spend at least a couple of hours each day in manual labour such as gardening, carpentry, sweeping the house, rooms and cleaning the lavatories and stitch the clothes, etc., so that they may understand the dignity of labour. Monks have the vow of poverty by virtue of which they shall not possess worldly belongings. But, when trying days come, when mendicancy will be outlawed by states, or the begging bowls return empty, monks are self-confident in earning their bread and butter through the sweat of their brow. A monk belongs to the proletarian class. He lives by the word of God which is his prime bread of life.

Although the immediate and specific objectives are different for various religious orders, the broad-based principles of spiritual life and counsels of Christian perfection are the self-same for novices and the professed members of all religious confraternities. There are sown during the Dominican novitiate seeds of philosophical research and theo-

logy, besides a strong foundation they lay in ethics and sound morality, with a kind of Stoicism and idealism combined. The practical aspect of such a training is to mould the novices into strong characters who will work in silence for the sheer intrinsic worth of their apostolate, and not for any worldly fame and pageantry. They are prepared to risk their fortunes, successes and their very life on the altar of Sacrifice. Of these novices and monks can be said in all truth the ideal of life which Rudyard Kipling gives us when he wrote:

"If you can keep your head when all about you
Are losing theirs and blaming it on you,
If you can trust yourself when all men doubt you,
But make allowances for their doubting too;
If you can wait and not be tired by waiting,
Or being lied about, don't deal in lies,
Or being hated, don't give way to hating,
And yet don't look too good, nor talk too wise.

If you dream—and not make dreams your master;
If you can think—and not make thoughts your aim,
If you can meet with Triumph and Disaster
And treat these two impostors just the same;
If you can bear to hear the truth you've spoken
Twisted by knaves to make a trap for fools,
Or watch the things you gave your life to, broken,
And stoop and build them up with worn-out tools.

If you can make one heap of all your winnings
And risk it on one turn of pitch-and-toss,
And lose, and start again at your beginnings
And never breathe a word about your loss;
If you can force your heart and nerve and sinew
To serve your turn long after they are gone,
And so hold on when there is nothing in you
Except the Will which says to them: 'Hold on'.

If you can talk with crowds and keep your virtue
Or walk with Kings—nor lose the common touch,
If neither foes nor loving friends can hurt you,
If all men count with you, but none too much,
If you can fill the unforgiving minute
With sixty seconds' worth of distance run

Yours is the Earth and everything that's in it,
And—which is more—you'll be a Man, my son."

As I look back to the one year of novitiate I underwent at Pistoia in the Dominican Order, these are the sentiments that I still feel today, thoughts and ideals of life which I once learnt as a Dominican novice, and of which I find echoes not only in Rudyard Kipling, but in many bards and sages of all times. The idealism of a religious monk or novice is practical, so solidly rooted in the facts of life, facts of impermanency of everything earthly, and permanency of the joys and happiness of the spirit. Unlike bodily excitements, spiritual joys never cloy and the novice who has been duly initiated into the esoteric of inner life finds a hidden manna in all those discipline, hard labour, sweat and tears he may have to own as his share. It is a price he pays to buy up the Infinite, the crucifixion he undergoes for the resurrection of the spirit, the winter gloom that freezes his body to look into the face of the oncoming spring, the twilight gloom of a dark night announcing the coming of the joyous dawn.

Monasticism releases the locked up powers of the spirit. It removes the cloud that shuts the true essence of our being from our eyes. For, as Asvaghosa, the greatest Buddhist philosopher monk says:

"While the essence of the mind is eternally clean and pure, the influence of ignorance makes possible the existence of a defiled mind. But inspite of the defiled mind, the mind itself is eternal, clear, pure and not subject to transformation."

Novitiate is the apprenticeship of the monk to recover his inner Self which is the reflection, image and substance of the very Absolute.

CHAPTER V

PROFESSION OF VOWS

"After having completed the novitiate, let the novice, if found fit, be admitted to the profession. If unfit, let the novice be dismissed. Should there be any doubt left with regard to the fitness of the candidate, let the major superiors prolong his novitiate for a period not exceeding another six months."

—*Canon Law* 571, 2, 3

"A monk must renounce sex and gold for his own welfare. Even if he is unattached, and consequently not in danger, still, in order to set an example to others, he must not keep sex and gold near him. The *Sanjasi*, a monk, a man of renunciation, is a world teacher. It is his example that awakens the spiritual consciousness of men."

—*Ramakrishna's Gospel* p. 395

"Beset with lust, men run about like a snared hare; let therefore the mendicant drive out thirst, by striving after passionless for himself."

—*Buddha—Dhammapada* 24.

The novitiate, the trial period, being over, the candidate gains entrance into, and formal membership of, the monastic order. This solemn entry into the inner circle of the monastic life takes place when the novice, at the successful termination of his novitiate, emits his profession of vows. Usually, a temporary profession of vows for three years is made by the novice, which may be renewed after every three years, or one may take perpetual vows after the temporary profession.

During the novitiate the candidates and the monastic authorities must be sure of their respective grounds, since religious profession is a bilateral agreement between the professed and the monastic or-

der to serve each other to their best on condition that the candidates observe all the rules and constitutions of the given monastery or Order and the Order, in its turn, undertakes to sustain and help the individuals in unfolding their spiritual powers and exercising their ministry. In the Society of Jesus, in Zen monasteries, in the Capuchin Order and the Sankara Maths, and some other monastic orders, the novitiate period is most trying and exacting before the novices are allowed to formal membership of the Order through profession.

From that amorphous vocational sense, that undefined spiritual urge for Soul-perfection, to formal initiation, novitiate, profession and ordination there is a natural growth, gradual unfolding of the Self and a progressive graded march towards God-realisation. On the one side, there is growing renunciation of selfishness, sex-craze and acquisitive greed through the vows of obedience, chastity and poverty; but, on the other hand, there is growing freedom, emancipation of the spirit, experienced by a monk. There is a new romantic rhapsody at each step which a monk climbs from initiation and novitiate to profession and ordination, and the subsequent ministry. There is an inward joy which displaces all sham joys of skin-deep thrills of flesh and blood. There is ever-expanding love of the Real, of God which outweighs or neutralises all other lustful loves that make us cling on to our bodily and earthly existence. As St John of the Cross says:

"The soul of one who serves God always swims in joy, always keeps holiday, is always in her place of jubilation ever singing with fresh ardour and fresh pleasure, the new song of joy and love."

Each religious order has its own formula of profession. But the essence of the religious profession is the self-same in all monastic institutions. It con-

sists in pledging loyalty to the Order, to its Rules and Constitutions and ideals, to the governing body of superiors. I made my temporary profession in October 1936. The formula I then used may be translated from the Latin as follows:

"I, Brother Antoninus Elenjmittam, hereby make my profession. I promise obedience to God, to the Blessed Virgin Mary, to our Father St Dominic, and to you, Very Rev. Fr Dominic Troisi, the Prior of St Dominic's Priory, Pistoia, *in lieu of the Most Rev. Fr Stanislaus Gillet, the Master General of the Friars Preachers, and his success, or that I will be obedient to you and your successors for three years, in accordance with the Rule of St Augustine and the Constitutions of the Order of Friars Preachers.*"

A simple profession for a period of three years is first taken at the successful conclusion of the novitiate, as a preparation for the taking of the final, perpetual and irrevocable vows. That solemn profession of perpetual vows I took in October, 1939, at the Dominican Priory of Minerva, Rome, using the above-quoted formula excepting that towards the end of the formula we use the words: "I promise obedience until death", in the place of "three years".

As one surveys the history of philosophy and religion, one wonders why on earth the noblest and greatest sages and saints bound themselves down with vows. Plato took the vow of perpetual continence for which he had to offer sacrifices to greek gods as penalty! Socrates lived by the vow of voluntary poverty to such an extent that he could point out to his utter poverty as the proof of his divine vocation to become the "gadfly" to arouse and awaken and educate the youth of Athens. The Essenes of Palestine and the Therapeutae of the Lake Maoris of Egypt, the Sufi mystics of Persia, the Pythagorians and the Neo-platonists, the Buddhist monks and the Christian monks and nuns in their thousands have taken vows, as though arming themselves

against the enticements, seductions, illusions and fascinations of the bodily life, and tying themselves down as it were to permanent values of the spirit.

Everywhere, at all times, sexual thirsts and sensual pleasures have stifled spiritual growth, blurred and obscured intellectual lustre, softened, mollified, and finally weakened will-power, destroyed memory and reduced human beings to the level of beasts and animals; while, through self-discipline, self-control and eternal vigilance, men have succeeded in getting the best out of their lives, make their talent and potential powers blossom forth and fructify, reach the summits of spiritual perfection and dispense mysteries of redemption and spiritual emancipation to mankind, enveloped in darkness of sin and ignorance.

The tempests of passions and emotional upheavals and their results on our nervous system, and subsequently on our whole mental and moral life, can easily be discerned by any unsophisticated mind. Just as a field left to itself produces nothing but weeds, cockle and bracken, wild jungles or deserts, so the mind of man, when not disciplined, trimmed, bridled, controlled and concentrated, produces weeds and cockles of sins and vices, jungles and forests where there is not seen a ray of the sunlight. But, the same field, when tilled, cultivated, seeds sown and well attended to, will yield fruits, flowers, cereals, pulses and other produces that sustain human life. So, monks in their religious orders go to the extreme limits in cultivating their minds and souls so that no weed may grow therein, no passion-emotion tangles may blur their mind and weaken their will and destroy their memory. They discipline themselves in such a way that all mental and moral fields of soul may produce the best of flowers, fruits, cereals and other nutritive foods for the souls, minds and hearts of men. The lay

people are satisfied with average goodness. A householder has not enough leisure, time, nor energy to go beyond mediocrity in spiritual life. Those among the householders who aspire after spiritual perfection must take their stand on religious vows. Mahatma Gandhi took the vow of chastity and voluntary poverty when he yearned towards climbing higher the ladder of spiritual life. Gautama the Buddha was born a prince; he spent his early youth in princely pomps and pageantry. But when he sought after fuller and deeper interior life, the life of full enlightenment and divine wisdom, he had to give up his wealth, his wife and child and all, and don himself with the rugged clothes of a mendicant monk with a begging bowl in his hands. He had to undergo hardships and perform penances and practise for six years self-discipline and self-purification until he reached the summits of wisdom, when he was in his thirtieth year of age.

The number of vows will vary with different religious orders; but the substance of them all are reduced to renunciation; renunciation of possessions and acquisitive greed, renunciation of sensual pleasures and sexual indulgences, renunciation of egoism and self-centredness. Only then one gains the freedom to plunge into the heart of God, into the ocean of Truth-Knowledge-Bliss, *sat-chit-ananda*, variously called as God-realisation, Self-realisation, *Mukti* or *Nirvana*.

The graded progress of a monk from those vague primitive urges for perfection to the taking of solemn perpetual vows to dedicate himself wholly and fully to the service of God is best studied in the monasticism of monks and nuns of the Buddhist Sangha and the Catholic Church. Those secluded, cloistered nuns and monks, those Trappists, Carthusians, the *First Orders* for cloistered men and

women, the Carmelites, the Visitation nuns, the cloistered Dominican and Franciscan nuns, the Benedictines and a good many other ancient and even modern religious orders of the Catholic Church stand in array to deery the folly and fallacy of the worldlings who, ensnared in sensual entanglements have their heads and hearts beclouded as not to see the splendour of the Logos and that sun that enlightens every man that comes into this world, God, the solar system of the mental world.

The professed monks or nuns are protected from the corroding and corrupting influences of the world not by running away from the struggles of life, but by facing them through a kind of defiance of the accepted standards of the world, and affirming monastic imponderable values of the spirit, by adhering firmly on to the rock of Self-guided life. The world says, "Blessed are the rich who have plenty of gold and bank balances and properties." But a monk says, "Blessed are the poor, for theirs is the Kingdom of God." The world says, "Happy are those who enjoy sex and sensual pleasures to their fill." But monks and nuns say, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." The worldlings say, "Happy are the those who look smart, diplomatic and who can succeed with men and things." A monk or a nun says, "Blessed are the simple, straight and the single-minded, for they shall fly across the ocean of sorrow, misery and spiritual death."

The world is intoxicated with lusts and concupiscences in a thousand forms and in a thousand colours. They suffer from the nemesis of inordinate desires, sexual thirsts and that white heat of sensual cravings which enervate the spiritual powers of their brains and freeze the tender feelings of human heart. They are struck with diseases and turpitude of the worst type; and yet, they

are after them, even to the dissolution of their physical frame and decrepitude of their mental powers. Nemesis strikes them down and yet, even amidst sickness and death, their sense-intoxicated souls dream of nothing but bodily existence and bodily excitements. I have known cases of worldly men in their sixties and seventies, smitten with tuberculosis and heart diseases, with T.B. and V.D. afflictions, still looking back lingering to youthful maidens and worldly triflings as though they were gods. Yet, the icy hands of Death strike them. They are swept away with the flood of worldlings that are being hurled down into the jaws of death every day of the month, every hour of the day.

What a power is cosmic illusion, that *maya* that hides Reality from the eyes of the worldlings! Browning said, "Some think creation is meant to show Him forth. I say it is meant to hide Him all it can." Creation is just a cloud between the soul and God. Yet, even clouds are not seen but through the sun, even when the sun hides its face behind the clouds.

What is known as *Maya* in the Vedanta philosophy is called *Anatta* in Buddhism and the "Original Sin" in Christianity. Now the subsequent training of a monk or nun aims at the emancipation of the soul from the tyranny of *maya*, *anatta* and *original Sin*. There is no wonder, then, that greater emphasis is laid on integrity than on intelligence, holiness than on scholarship, moral goodness than on erudition, inner beauty of the soul rather than on bodily glamour and lustre. The period of studies and training of the professed monk or nun continues until they reach full-fledged monkship. A perfect saintly monk is called *Arahat* in Buddhism, *saint* in Christianity and *mukta* in Hinduism. Perfection is reached when the battles between bodily passions and spiritual enlightenment have trium-

phed in the mastery of the soul over the body, of spirit over matter, godliness and saintliness embedded in the heart of an individual over the sinfulness and vices of the unredeemed masses. The angelic and divine in man have now triumphed over the tiger and ape in him.

The training of the professed may last from two years to fifteen years according to the ideals of a particular religious order and the sort of ministry one is supposed to engage in. A lay brother whose main ministry will be to serve to the bodily needs of the religious community may have only two or three years of training which consists in regular spiritual exercises such as meditation, prayer, good reading, community prayers and the specific fields of manual work such as carpentry, carpet-making, laundry, stitching, sewing, shoe-making, electrical engineering, gardening, farming, poultry and other fields of lay ministry.

But those who have to reach higher degrees of perfection in strictly spiritual ministry such as teaching, preaching, literary activities, social uplift and philanthropic works will have to undergo training in Philosophy, Theology, History of Christianity, Canon Law, language studies such as the Greek, Hebrew, Latin and Sanskrit among the ancient languages, and one or more modern language which one is supposed to use as the medium of monastic and priestly ministry. The members of the society of Jesus have usually the longest and the most stringent training from twelve to fifteen years until they reach full-fledged priestly ministry.

Renunciation of personal possessions and sexual lusts are meant for the strengthening of the spirit to triumph over the tyranny of the body. The strongest bonds that tie us down to earth and earthly lusts, viz., acquisitive greed and sensual pleasures, are torn asunder from body and soul which are to-

gether consecrated to God through solemn religious vows. Besides and beyond merely a philosophic conviction resulting from discursive thought and experience, there is the added incentive and consecration, the tie of vows, those bonds voluntarily imposed upon oneself for the emancipation of the spirit from every form of earthly bondage. That is the reason why saints have sung in chorus that to be servants of God means to be the freest citizens in this world and the next.

The religious practices such as daily meditations, examination of conscience, spiritual reading and community discipline are all directed towards one supreme goal, which is the birth of discrimination between the Real and the unreal, *maya* and *śhaya*, the Eternal and the temporal, the skin-deep pleasures which finally end in misery and death, and the soul-deep joys which never cloy but grow ever intenser and brighter as life matures into its fulness. Hence, in all the well-organised religious orders of both Christianity and Buddhism the greatest stress is laid on morality, ethics, mysticism which are all different degrees of goodness and godliness ever growing and blossoming forth in the soul of men, reaching the life of God himself, one with Brahma-consciousness. Then the body becomes the vehicle of Dharma—*dharmakaya*—as the Buddhists would call it. The body then becomes the sanctuary of soul, temple of God.

The professed period of training lasts for full eight years in the Dominican order of which I am a member. The professed life of students is a kind of continued novitiate, with this difference that the professed are being nourished and nurtured with more solid spiritual food than the novices, as now the religious discipline aims at the formation of character and equipping the intellect with salutary knowledge and sacred sciences; and there is less of

als and ordeals which was the keynote during the novitiate. For those who live to the ideal of religious order, this long period of professed training is a source of occasional ecstasy and continuous joy, inner peace and poise which few in the world could even visualise. This inner joy and ecstasy, however faint or interrupted it may be, strengthens the heart and mind of a young monk or nun to steer on, struggle on, forge ahead until he or she has crossed the yonder shores of existence, until the music of Eternity rings continually in his or her heart, and the purpose of human pilgrimage on this earth fulfilled, realised.

While in the Buddhist *Sangha* and Hindu *Maths* the general tendency is to look to the past, restrict their studies to their respective scriptures and religious lore, the vanguard shock-troops of the monastic orders of the Catholic Church take pains to equip themselves with the latest scientific and philosophic weapons. They keep abreast of times; they study social sciences, civics, astronomy, comparative religion and various other subjects—on a par with the best organised university courses with a view to entering the arena with the most up-to-date weapons of spiritual conquest. This is the ideal set forth in various modern religious aggregations such as the Jesuits, the Salesians, the Society of St Paul, the Paulists and various missionary societies. The ideal is set forth clearly in the constitutions, but due to lack of correct leadership and creative dynamics, in the Catholic Church also there is obscurantism, tendency to cling on to the conservative safest policy, reducing religion to merely mumbling of vocal prayers, discipline in external practices without inner transmutation of the spirit, clinging on to the empty shells wherefrom the kernel has been robbed off; the nestlings have fled away. That is the rea-

son why reforms come in every religious order, reforms which, while preserving the essential spirit of the religious life, will trim, prune, add, subtract, build, re-mould and re-shape the organisation in order to serve best its objective in a fast changing world.

Protestant reform, while trying to correct the abuses in the Church and in monasteries, emptied out the baby with the bath water when they laid their axe on the very life of monasticism. Luther, an Augustinian monk, came out and became a householder, by marrying Catherine Bora who was herself a nun, who was enticed away by the great reformer. In other words, the religious earthquake of the Protestant reform, did indeed correct many abuses; but it also brought schism and errors and heresies of the first order, simply because individualistic subjectivism is only half-truth in man who is essentially a social angel. Similarly, collectivism and socialised standardisation are again half-truths to be corrected and integrated with individualist philosophy. Man, outside of society, is either a brute or an animal. Society, without personality and individual initiative, is either a robot or herd. It is in this light that we have still to work out a synthesis and creative integration between the Catholic and Protestant attitudes towards the problems and challenges of life which will serve not only the unification of divided Christendom, but also will go a long way to the unification of mankind, since; religions and civilisations move horizontally on the Catholic and Protestant lines. Hinduism is catholic, while Buddhism and Jainism are protestant branches thereof. Tibetan Lamaism lives and works on Roman Catholic lines, while the Theravadins of Ceylon, Cambodia and Burma move on Protestant lines. Catholicism holds aloft the ideal of society, even to the point of at-

times sacrificing individuality and personality and freedom, while Protestantism upholds the ideal of each-man-for-himself and exalts subjective individualism to the point of disorganising and disintegrating the society. The present-day competitive disintegration of the western society could be traced back to Protestantism and the period of humanism and renaissance which preceded it. Similarly, the forms of totalitarianism, standardisation, Fascism, collectivistic tendencies and socialism of the west have their echoes and roots in Catholicism.

It is here the eastern ideals of religious and monastic life have their corrective and integrative mission for enriching the cultural heritage of mankind. In Hinduism and Buddhism, the more one reaches the ideal of a monk, the freer he feels released from social conventions, ceremonial rubrics and liturgical observances. A monk in Hinduism, Jainism, and Buddhism is a *nirgranth*, one who has broken off all his fetters and has become a nomad revolving around God, the Self of the universe. For him it will be a heresy to conform to the social rules and practices while, in the West, it will be a heresy for a monk not to conform to the rubrics and ceremonies and liturgy of the Church. In the East it will be a heresy not to identify the Self-realised soul with God or the Over-soul. In the West, it will be heresy to say that the soul, the real soul, the real Self of man is one with the Self of the Universe. In the East, it will be heresy for a monk to believe or say that he must put his trust in bank balances or landed properties and endowments for his sustenance while, in the West, it will be a heresy to deny to the religious communities the right to properties and endowments. In the East it is the most natural thing that young men spend some time in monasteries just to try their vocation, and come out if they have not, or if they have lost their

vocation. In the East after becoming a full-fledged monk or a priest he can go back to the lower state of a layman. But in the West it is a matter of social stigma and dishonour if a monk or a priest leaves his state and becomes a householder, or a householder becomes a monk except in a few cases like Berchmans, Margaret of Cortona and a few others. In Burma it is a common practice for young boys to live in monasteries, submit to monastic discipline and don monastic robes, and then return to the world to become householders. Householders renouncing the world may become monks. In Indian History many kings and princes and princesses have renounced everything and have become monks or nuns. Emperor Asoka became a Buddhist monk. Princess Mira of Merwar left her home and became a Hindu nun and saint. So did Tukaram and Tulsi Das abandoning the life of a householder became monks and saints and mystics.

Although differences there are in the technique of training in Christian, Hindu and Buddhist monasteries, the great ideal of renunciation is at the root of the monastic discipline. That some monks and nuns do not actually renounce is not an argument against the monastic ideal. These are sad facts proving that they have fallen off from their lofty ideal. Lapses are pretty common in monasteries of both the East and West, which is more a proof of human frailty rather than a stick to beat the ideal of monasticism itself. Monastic life does not depend on tunic and tonsure, on robes and begging bowls, but on the transformed consciousness of monks and nuns in their lives, a new attitude, literally a second birth, a *dwijahood*.

In order to attain the target of monastic training both during the novitiate and student period of the professed, it is of utmost importance that we should have experienced and self-realised guides

and masters to guide novices and students. When that is lacking, there is a tendency to stick to formalism, ceremonialism, legalism and superficiality. The young will go the avenues of adventure which the superiors, should not block; and allow abuses which should not be there. When I was a student in Minerva I was not allowed to study Indian philosophy direct from representative thinkers like Sankara, Vivekananda, Rabindranath Tagore and others, but only through the filtered and censored sources of Catholic publications. Yet, the same superiors took it lying down when some other religious did not care for any serious studies, but indulged in idle gossip, smoking cigarettes and running after vanities. These may become unavoidable defects when monastic life descends to practical ends. But the monastic ideal itself is immaculate which is self-crucifixion for soul-resurrection, renunciation of all for attaining the fullest enlightenment. As Shantideva, a master-mind among monks, said:

"Free from commerce and hindrance, possessing nought but his body, he has no grief at the hour of death, for already he has died to the world; no neighbours are there to vex him or disturb his remembrance of the Enlightened and like thoughts. Then I will ever woo sweet solitude, untroubled dayspring of bliss, stilling all unrest. Released from all other thoughts, with mind utterly set upon my own spirit, I will strive to centre and control my spirit...

Make thyself a spy for the service of others, and whatsoever thou seest in thy body's work that is good for thy fellow, perform it so that it may be conveyed to them. Be thou jealous of thine own self when thou seest that it is at ease and thy fellow in distress, that it is in high state and he is brought low, that he is at rest and he is at labour... So I have surrendered my body indifferently for the work of the world; it is but as an instrument of work that I still bear it, with all its guilt. Enough then of worldly ways! I follow in the path of the wise, remembering the discourse on heedfulness and putting away sloth. To overcome the power of darkness I centre my thought, drawing the spi-

rit away from vain paths and fixing it straightly upon its stay."

—*Shantideva's Bhodicharyavatara*

In monasticism everywhere in the East or in the West Self-realisation is sought as a means to dynamic social and spiritual service of fellow-humans. The whole training in the monasteries, nunneries and cloistered cells are directed towards this great target of God-realisation and God-realised dynamics in society for uplifting others from misery, unhappiness and death.

CHAPTER VI

ORDINATION

"Wake up the note! the song that had its birth
 Far off, where worldly taint could never reach
 In mountain caves, and glades of forest deep,
 Whose calm no sigh for lust or wealth or fame
 Could ever dare to break; where rolled the stream
 Of knowledge, truth, and bliss that follow both.
 Sing high that note, Sanyasin bold! Say—'*Om Tat Sat*
Om'.

Strike off thy fetters! Bonds that bind thee down,
 Of shining gold or darker, baser ore,
 Love, hate—good, bad—and all the dual throng.
 Know slave is slave, caressed or whipped, not free;
 For fetters though of gold, are not less strong to bind;
 Then, off with them, Sanyasin bold! Say—'*Om Tat Sat*
Om'.

Let darkness go; the will-o'-the-wisp that leads
 With blinking light to pile more gloom on gloom.
 This thirst for life, for ever quench; it drags
 From birth to death, and death to birth, the soul.
 He conquers all who conquers self. Know this
 And never yield, Sanyasin bold! Say—'*Om Tat Sat*
Om'.

'Who sows must reap', they say, 'and cause must bring
 The sure effect; good, good; bad, bad; and none
 Escape the law. But whosoever wears a form
 Must wear the chain'. Too true; but far beyond
 Both name and form is Atman, ever free.
 Know Thou art That, Sanyasin bold! Say—'*Om Tat Sat*
Om'.

They know not truth, who dream such vacant dreams
 As father, mother, children, wife, friend
 The sexless Self! whose father He? whose child?
 Whose friend, whose foe is He who is but One?
 The Self is all in all, none else exists;
 And Thou art That, Sanyasin bold! Say—'*Om Tat Sat*
Om'.

There is but One—The Free—The Knower—Self!
 Without a name, without a form or stain.

In Him is Maya, dreaming all this dream.
 The Witness, He appears as nature, soul.
 Know thou art That, Sanyasin bold! Say—'*Om Tat Sat Om*'.

Where seekest thou? That freedom, friend, this world
 Nor that, can give. In books and temples vain
 Thy search. Thine only is the hand that holds
 The rope that drags thee on. Then cease lament,
 Let go thy hold, Sanyasin bold! Say—'*Om Tat Sat Om*'.

Say, 'Peace to all: From me no danger be
 To aught that lives. In those that dwell on high,
 In those that lowly creep, I am the Self in all
 All life both here and there, do I renounce,
 'All heavens, and earths and hells, all hopes and fears.'
 Thus cut thy bonds, Sanyasin bold! Say!—'*om Tat Sat Om*'.

Heed, then, no more how body lives or goes,
 Its task is done, let Karma float it down;
 Let one put garlands on, another kick
 This frame; say nought. No praise or blame can be
 When praiser, praised, and blamer blamed are—one.
 Thus be thou calm, Sanyasin bold! Say—'*Om Tat Sat Om*'.

Truth never comes where lust and fame and greed
 Of gain reside. No man who thinks of woman
 As his wife can ever perfect be;
 Nor he who owns the least of things, nor he,
 Whom anger chains, can ever pass thro' Maya's gates.
 So, give these up, Sanyasin bold! Say—'*Om Tat Sat Om*'.

Have thou no home. What home can hold thee, friend?
 The sky thy roof, the grass thy bed, and food
 What chance may bring; well-cooked or ill, judge not.
 No food or drink can taint that noble Self
 Which knows itself. Like rolling river free
 Thou ever be, Sanyasin bold! Say—'*Om Tat sat Om*'.

Few only know the truth. The rest will hate
 And laugh at thee, great one; but pay no heed.
 Go thou, the free, from place to place, and help
 Them out of darkness, Maya's veil. Without
 The fear of pain or search for pleasure, go
 Beyond them both, Sanyasin bold! Say—'*Om Tat Sat Om*'.

Thus, day by day, till Karma's power is spent

Release the soul for ever. No more is birth,
 Nor I, nor thou, nor God, nor man. The 'I'
 Has All become, and the All is 'I' and Bliss.
 Know thou art That, Sanyasin bold! Say—'Om Tat Sat
 Om'.

(Swami Vivekananda's 'The Song of the Sanyasin')

This is one of the best poems which gives us in a nutshell the ideal goal of a monk, *sanyasin*. But this stage of freedom and emancipation is reached after years of discipline, training, self-effort, study, prayer and hard, uphill toil. It is a grand day in the life of a monk when he is found fit to be ordained with full freedom to live his life. Similarly for nuns, most romantic and ecstatic is the day when they make their final solemn profession, pronouncing before their superiors their final vows, when their souls are for ever dedicated to the service of the Lord.

Ordination day is the bright day which every young professed monk, a seminarist,* and Hindu Sanyasi or a Buddhist Sramanera will be looking forward to. Prior to his ordination to Bhikhuship, a Buddhist aspirant, though clad in yellow robes and studying and living up to Buddhist ideals of life, is still known as a *sramanera*, one who is standing on the threshold of full-fledged monasticism. He stands at the doorsteps, waiting for the blessing from his *guru*, the senior monk who had initiated him, trained him and was diligently and vigilantly watching over him until he became a full-fledged monk, ready to become the dispenser of *Dhamma*. What strenuous training and trials had the ancient monks to undergo before they were ordained full-fledged monks and were allowed to go forth spreading the gospel of salvation! Buddha himself, who so minutely laid down the rules of his monastic order or *Sangha*, rules so stringent and detailed as contained in the *Vinaya Pitaka*, took good care to train

his disciples for a long time until they were found fit to continue the ministry of dispensing *Nirvana* to the people. Here is an account of Puran, one of the disciples of Buddha, who after being trained for long, so completely subdued his lower self and attained ethical and moral perfection demanded of Buddhist monks, that he got permission from the Buddha himself to go out and wander forth preaching and teaching for the welfare of many. Here is the dialogue between the Buddha and his disciple Puran, before he was found worthy and approved as a preacher by Buddha. This dialogue gives an insight into the ideal of spiritual perfection needed for the ordination of monks and nuns, ordination that makes them full-fledged votaries of Dharma and missionaries of ethical religion.

Puran, a disciple of Buddha, after years of training, intends to go to Sonapranth and preach Dharma to the people. He, then, goes to Buddha and manifests his intention to the Master who says:

"The people of Sonapranth, Puran, are very fierce. If they abuse you and speak evil words against you, what will you do?"

Puran: "Then, I will think the people of Sonapranth to be really good, because they did not throw stones at me and beat me."

Buddha: "But if they raise hands on you and beat you?"

Puran: "Still, I will consider them good, as they only beat me and did not kill me."

Buddha: "And if they kill you, what will you think of them?"

Puran: "Still, I will consider them to be really good, as they have thereby released me from this mortal body which many monks desire to get rid off."

Buddha, then, applauded the mental attitude of Puran and gave him his blessing to go and preach

Dharma wherever he wanted. It is that complete mastery of the lower instincts which Buddha lauded in Puran and the subsequent self-realised dynamics which was essential in a monk to undertake his vocational mission of healing the sufferings of mankind. It is only by dying to self and sex, selfishness and sexuality that we can develop the locked-up powers and latent potentialities of the spirit of man.

In Buddhism, especially among the Theravadians, candidates are sometimes ordained in view of their future holiness. Some of the senior monks do not give to juniors a kind of systematic and graded training lasting for years as we find in the Catholic monasteries and religious orders. And yet, the saving feature is that the Buddhist monks give paramount importance to meditation, mindfulness, self-possession, those perennial springs of self-realisation, to those psychological facts of spiritual life, which are the roots of super-consciousness of the enlightened monks and nuns. This psychological approach in Buddhism is in sharp contrast to the historical and factual methods in Christian monasteries, where external obedience, external conformity to rules and regulations, community life, meditations on historical facts of Christ and the Christian Church have more importance than introspective brooding, unfettered search after Truth with no reference to the scriptures and authorities.

I have had opportunities to assist at both Christian and Hindu-Buddhist ordinations. At a Christian ordination service to priesthood or even lesser orders, the ordinations are held in a state of trance through gorgeous ceremonies, choral chants, burning of incense, invocation of the Holy Spirit and a general other-worldly, God-centred and self-alienated atmosphere. But the Buddhist ordination is much simpler, consisting of fewer ceremonies and—in the Theravada church—so self-centred and self-

possessed that no reference to God and other-worldly aspects are even mentioned. Here the insistence is on self-effort and a strong will which must have power even to obliterate the consequences of past *karma* and engender a minor Buddha or Bodhistava in an ordained monk. Christian ordination is based on the doctrine of the supernatural grace of God, while Buddhist ordination hinges on self-discipline and self-redemptive efforts which displace any concept of unchangeable *Karma* or supernatural agencies. With Ella Wheller Wilcox, a Buddhist monk could sing:

"There is no chance, no destiny, no fate
Can circumvent, or hinder, or control
The firm resolve of a determined soul.
Gifts count for nothing; will alone is great,
All things give way before it soon or late.
What obstacles can stay the mighty force
Of the sea-seeking river in its course,
Or cause the ascending orb of day to wait?
Each well born soul must win what it deserves.
Let the fool prate of luck. The fortunate
Is he whose earnest purpose never swerves,
Whose slightest action or inaction serves The one great
aim."

At the ordination each monk comes out with the philosophy of life in which he was trained during his years of professed religious discipline. A Christian monk marches forward with the music of grace of God, a Buddhist monk with the song of self-effort and "firm resolve", and a Hindu monk with the canticle of emancipation, which is best expressed in the famous *Song of a Sanyasin* of Swami Vivekananda as quoted above. The years of preparation, training and discipline, the course of studies in the scriptures, philosophy, theology and ethics and allied subjects have all found fulfilment when a candidate is ordained monk or priest.

While in the Hindu-Buddhist world ordination of a monk is essentially monastic in character, in

Christianity ordination or conferring of "Holy Orders" is essentially sacerdotal in character. Since Catholic Christianity is the most organised and disciplined religion of the world with totalitarian and centralised authority, it is here that ordination is taken as entry into sacerdotal powers and duties which mainly consist in the ministerial and administrative functions of the Church.

The parting line, then, in ordination between Christian and the Hindu-Buddhist world is that Christian ordination is closely linked up with the sacerdotal, presbyterial and episcopal functions, while in the Hindu-Buddhist world ordination is no more than mere solemn confirmation of one's monastic vocational duties. But, in the Catholic, Anglo-Catholic and allied forms of traditional churches, there are monks ordained as priests, who have a dual role to play in the life of the Church. As monks, they share the common essentials with the monastic life in the Hindu-Buddhist world, while as ordained priests, they share the administrative and teaching ministry of the Church. While the secular clergy, by and large, remain the trained officials of the hierarchical ruling Church, the monastic priests of the Church remain predominantly monks and secondarily priests.

Such an eminent monk like Francis of Assisi, the patriarch of the Franciscan group of monastic orders, refused to be ordained priest, ostensibly out of humility, but really out of fear that he might have thereby lost his monastic vocation. The very nature of priestly functions and sacerdotal duties that flow from taking orders make an individual so extrovert that he becomes a kind of ecclesiastical commissar, unless he is strong and and introspective enough as to create a monastic cell of his own in his mind and, dwelling therein in a habitual state of union with God or his Real

Self, works hard for the spiritual and moral uplift of the flock entrusted to his care by his bishop or ecclesiastical superior. But the chances of priests retaining their spiritual fervour and earnestness, diligence and vigilance for the discovery of the Inner Self and to grow in holiness in the presence of that Inner Witness and on the Soul-tabernacle are so scanty that serious priests enter some monastic order or they create a cell of their own into which they could withdraw from time to time for conversing with their Real Self.

The degeneration of monastic vocation to priesthood, and of the priestly profession into a profitable priestcraft appears to be a universal phenomenon in the history of religion, and is by no means restricted to Christianity or Hinduism. The Bhikhus of the Theravada School, the Lamas of Tibetan Lamaism and the Bonzes of Japanese and Chinese Mahayana Buddhism, compelled by social necessities, descend a step lower and become something like the Christian parish priests, with their own parish and flock to minister to, by way of preaching, performing religious offerings, observing rites and ceremonies. On the whole, from a purely comparative observation and research, it becomes clearer that Christian monks, nuns and priests, to whichever denomination they may happen to belong, from the wide range from Roman Catholicism to Quakerism and Unitarianism—are far better organised and equipped for the performance of their duties than the Buddhist Bhikhus, the Hindu Sanyasins, Tibetan Lamas, Chinese Bonzes and nuns of the Orient. This is a bit ticklish generalisation, as we know that there are so many exceptions that prove that enlightenment and spiritual values, redemptive work and spiritual ministry are of the highest order in the lives of many individual monks, nuns and priests in all the three great religions.

Yet, the statement stands that Catholic Christianity, because of its blend with the historical and cultural currents of the West, still remains unrivalled in producing monks, nuns, priests and missionaries, ordained or otherwise, by far better organised and with superior equipment, training and discipline than the organised monasticism or priesthood in any other religion.

In the Hindu-Buddhist world there come out stalwart spiritual giants so towering that the general mass of monks and nuns are dwarfed by them. To one great giant Swami Vivekananda there are hundreds of mediocre and imitation *swamis* sheltering under his wings and basking in his religious order. But in Western Christian religious organisations, many stalwart monks and nuns follow in the footsteps of their founder in quick succession, even if only few reach the heights as their founder. To one Mahatma Gandhi there are hundreds of imitation Gandhis. Under the moonshine of one Rabindranath Tagore many mediocre souls bask in his ashram at Shantiniketan.

The nearest approach to the ordained monks and nuns of the Hindu-Buddhist world is found in the various monastic orders of the Catholic Church, all those monks, friars, brothers and sisters of the Roman Catholic Church. As though repining over the pre-Reformation traditions of England and with a view to coming on par with Catholicism except in its claims of Papacy, the High Church of England also is today fostering a number of monastic orders for monks and nuns. But the secular clergy of the Catholic and Anglican Churches and the ministers of the Lutheran, Non-Conformist and Free Christian groups of churches have little in common with the monastic ideals of the Catholic Church, the Buddhist *Sangha* and the Hindu *Sanyasa* for men and women.

And, yet, the ordained secular clergy of the Church have so much of individual freedom and individual life that they could climb the ladder of perfection quicker if they will.

Few secular priests make use of their opportunities and freedom for reaching spiritual perfection. They continue to remain ecclesiastical officials with acquisitiveness and moving on their rear gear. Their only check is the Canon Law which may or may not be enforced according to the character of the bishop overseeing them. Monks, by their very community life and the vow of poverty—which now the secular clergy do not take—with all the world of difference resulting therefrom, tend to become more and more introspective, meditative and selfless. Monasticism, whether in Hinduism, Buddhism or Christianity, is the Yogi ideal, while the secular priesthood represents the commissar concept. There, indeed, is a world of difference between the *yogi* and the commissar, whether in the Soviet Union, in the Roman Catholic Church, in the Anglo-Catholic Church, in Hinduism or anywhere else.

If it is objected that the holy orders are not meant to make the secular clergy ecclesiastical commissars, the answer is that the very nature of the priestly ministry in all religions is fraught with dangers to spiritual life because it refuses to take the vow of voluntary poverty. Where there is even a loophole left for lust for money, the other lusts will follow in train, notably the lust for power, ecclesiastical positions and dividends and lusts for pleasures and enjoyments in spite of their vow of chastity.

In Christianity there is a golden mean reached by the masses since the under-dogs are levelled up and the supermen are levelled down so that the backbone of the middle class is strengthened. This is true in religion, economics and social

life. In the Hindu-Buddhist countries we find a few towering personalities in spirituality, wealth or power while the masses are held in superstition, poverty and weakness. In Christianity there is, generally speaking, a dignified minimum assured for the general masses, which is largely due to the religious and quasi-religious monastic and ecclesiastical organisations. Even the anti-Christian forces like militant materialistic communism flow as corollary from the social doctrine of Christianity which can, at times, under certain conditions, exist even without an organised churchianity.

The Buddhist ordained monks of the Mahayana school, like the Lamas of Tibet and the Chinese and Japanese bonzes may remain celibate or may become householders, while the ordained monks of the Theravada School, like the monks and nuns and priests of the Catholic Church are bound to remain celibate as per their special vow of chastity and canonical and monastic regulations. Where ordained ministers are allowed to become householders, there is a general tendency for the slackening of religious and mystical and monastic organisations. On the other hand, ordained ministers joining the ranks of householders have generally produced a sense of realism and practical sense among the people they happen to work with. Thus, the Anglican clergymen, who had their own families, show much more sympathy and understanding of human problems than a life-long celibate monk or nun of Hinduism, Buddhism or Catholicism. Some of the most refined and super-sensitive names in English history were the children of ordained clergymen.

Ordained priests are not monks; but monks may become ordained priests by virtue of which, besides their monastic vocation, they receive additional priestly functions and duties in the hierar-

chly of the Church. In the Catholic Church the priestly ordination of a cleric or monk is preceded by a series of graded ordinations beginning with the tonsure, the four 'minor orders', the subdiaconate and diaconate. In the ancient times there were deaconesses who were ordained to perform specific functions in the Church. With the organised growth of monastic orders for women, the nuns assumed the duties which were once confined to the deaconesses.

I have my own personal experience of both the monastic and priestly life after being a Dominican novice in 1935, a professed monk from 1936 onwards and an ordained priest from 1939 on. The major part of my monastic life was spent in Italy and of priestly ministry in England and India. I can now say out of my own experience that monastic life is far better a state for the spiritual perfection of the soul than priestly ministry. Among priests the saints are few, to be counted on the tip of the fingers, while among the monks the number of saints, canonised and otherwise, are by legions. A monk is, generally speaking, a *yogi*, while the priest is a commissar, the official of the religious organisation with scope for self-aggrandisement, possessiveness and acquisitiveness which all stand in the way of his spiritual perfection.

Individual possessiveness is certainly one of the major obstacles to the spiritual perfection of priests. Monks, specially large religious communities, own landed properties; but individual lust is killed by collective possession, and continuous check and supervision from the superiors who also *have to live according to the rules and regulations* of their religious order. In Ceylon, about one third of the cultivable land is owned, managed or controlled by the Buddhist monks. Yet, monks live poor, with no individual acquisitiveness, in

great simplicity and studiousness and meditativeness as compared to the priests who do not take the vow of poverty. In Tibet, the lamas also are protected from acquisitiveness with their vow and practice of poverty. While the western clergy and ordained priests were once rolling in wealth and all the vices that wealth—or rather the misuse of wealth—brings in its train, there was one poor beggar-saint who married “Lady Poverty”, and that was Francis of Assisi. He thereby gave birth to a new monastic order where even the ordained priests are to remain monks by strictest observance of poverty. Ordination confers priestly powers to the candidate; but it is no safeguard against human frailties and vices, whereas monastic discipline is an effective check on the lower nature; it paves way for the individual to climb higher and higher on the ladder of perfection. If they do not, the cause is to be found in sloth, indifference and slackness of individual members who will remain a decayed member of the Order, if he is not cut off as noxious. A monk-priest, living up to the ideal of his profession and ordination, is the highest call of Heaven to bestow on society peace, joy and spirituality.

CHAPTER VII

MINISTRY

"Go ye now, O monks, and wander forth for the welfare of many, for the happiness of mankind, out of compassion for the world. Preach the *Dhamma* (Religion) which is glorious in the beginning, glorious in the middle, and glorious in the end, in the spirit as well as the letter. There are beings whose eyes are scarcely covered with dust, but if the doctrine is not preached to them they cannot attain salvation. Proclaim to them a life of holiness. They will understand the doctrine and accept it."

—*Buddha*—Vin. Mah. I, 11, 1

"Going, therefore, teach ye all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you. And, behold, I am with you all days, even to the consummation of the world."

—*Jesus* (Matt. XXVIII, 19, 20)

"Freedom from fear, purity of heart, perseverance in pursuit of knowledge and abstraction of mind, gifts, self-restraint, and sacrifice, study of the Vedas, penance, straightforwardness, harmlessness, truth, freedom from anger, renunciation, tranquillity, freedom from the habit of backbiting, compassion on all beings, freedom from avarice, gentleness, modesty, absence of vain activity, noble-mindedness, forgiveness, courage, chastity, freedom from desire to injure others, absence of vanity, these, O Descendant of Bharata, are his who is born to godlike endowments."

—*Krishna* (Bhagavad Gita XVI, 1-3)

The years of preparation must yield fruit. Then a monk or nun, priest or a friar enters religious ministry. The novitiate, professed life, seminary and monastic training, cloistered seclusion and all the rules of conduct and strict discipline

were all meant to eradicate sins and vices, ignorance and weakness from the hearts of the trainees. That is the negative side of long years of training. But the positive side of monastic discipline consists in Self-realisation or a God-guided life with all the virtues and knowledge needed for uplifting fellow-humans from the mire of ignorance, sensuality and delusion. The preparatory stage is like charging a battery cell with enough power which, during ministry, gives out light and heat, light of knowledge and the radiance of virtues. Until one is ordained, he is trying to fill his cup with knowledge and virtue. But in the ministry, his cup overflows with the power to regenerate the fallen humanity.

All Buddhist monks and nuns look up to Gautama the Buddha, the *Tathagata*, for guidance, inspiration and pattern, as all Christian monks, nuns, priests and friars, sisters and brothers look up to Jesus Christ as their supreme model, example, guidance and inspiration. In Hinduism, each monk looks to his own respective *guru*, or any spiritual leader of his choice as his guidance. But, as Hinduism has little of that well-disciplined and organised monasticism for men and women as in Buddhism and Christianity, genuine monks coming out of long years of training are so few, while counterfeit and wandering beggars and idlers clothed in saffron robes are by thousands. In the twentieth century, the only organised order of Hindu monks who, after regular course of training and discipline, are ordained and are engaged in real religious ministry is the Ramakrishna Mission of monks, founded by Swami Vivekananda, who tried to blend Hindu philosophic and religious ideals with what is best in Christian monastic organisational discipline. This order of monks have as the motto of their ministry: *Atmano mokshartham, jagat hitayacha—*

work for the emancipation of the soul and the happiness of mankind. In two words, this motto sums up the purpose of monastic ministry which is common to Buddhist and Christian worlds, viz., to work for Self-realisation, *Nirvana*, God-vision for oneself and for others. Then we work for the genuine happiness and welfare of mankind.

For an ordained monk, priest or friar in Buddhism or Christianity, to embark upon ministry means to continue the work of their respective founders. It entails toil, labours, sweat and blood. It entails carrying the cross of Christ even unto the crucifixion; but behind all these toils and labours and crosses there is ineffable joy and inner peace and poise which spring from the depths of Self-realisation or God-consciousness. I have now thirty three years of monastic profession and twenty eight years of priestly ordination behind me enabling me to say that the ministry of professed monks and ordained persons is nothing short of the very ministry, that redemptive and saving ministry of Christ. It is this same awareness that made St Francis Xavier exclaim: "*Da mihi animas, cetera tolle*—Give me souls, take away from me everything else." Similarly for Buddhist ordained monks there is but one dream, one goal in all their ministry, and that is *Nirvana* for oneself and for others. "As the great ocean has but one taste, the taste of salt, so my doctrine has but one flavour, the flavour of *nirvana*," said the Buddha.

There are two distinct types of monastic ministry in Buddhism, Christianity and Hinduism, viz., contemplative and active forms of ministry. Contemplative ministry aims at the spiritual regeneration of mankind through increasing intensity of Self-realisation and contemplative prayer. In the Catholic Church all the cloistered monks and nuns, the Trappists, the Carthusians and the Cist-

ercians and contemplative monks. Among the contemplative nuns are the Second Order of the Carmelites, the Benedictines, the Franciscans, the Dominicans, the Nuns of Visitation and a good many other old and new contemplative orders. In Hinduism there are individual monks who devote themselves to contemplative ministry. In modern times, Sri Aurobindo of Pondicherry Ashram is the most shining example of Hindu contemplative ministry, who through silent Self-realisation powers hoped to regenerate and influence mankind.

The active ministry is twofold, pastoral and missionary. Pastoral ministry consists in feeding the flock of the Lord, to minister to the spiritual, ethical and social needs of an organised unit of a well-established religious society. The parish priest is the typical example of one engaged in pastoral ministry. An English Anglican parson, a Roman Catholic parish priest or curate, or a Buddhist bonze or lama has a definite area of a larger ecclesiastical unit to attend to, serve to, and minister unto. In the highly organised Roman Catholic Church, each parish is one of the several units grouped together under a bigger ecclesiastical province known as a diocese which is under the charge of a Bishop. A number of dioceses are grouped under a still bigger unit known as an archdiocese presided over by an archbishop or a metropolitan bishop. The union of dioceses and archdioceses and missions and prefectures and other ecclesiastical units are grouped under an Apostolic Delegation, Internunciature or Nunciature presided over by a Delegate Apostolic or Internuncio or Nuncio, who represents the Holy See in countries far and near. The former Delegation of East Indies comprised British India, Burma and Ceylon and dependencies which was under the charge of the late Leo P. Kierkles, C.P., who was a monk of the Passionist Order, an

ordained priest and a consecrated Bishop. After Indian independence and establishment of diplomatic relations between the Vatican and the Indian Republic, Archbishop Kierkles became the first Internuncio in Delhi, whose term of office was rendered fruitful and inspiring as an ideal monk, a zealous priest, saintly bishop and a statesmanlike Vatican diplomat. It was His Excellency, Leo P. Kierkles who encouraged me to seek and find bridges between Catholicism and Hinduism, the East and the West.

In the field of organised ministry Hinduism knows little or nothing of the organisational discipline which the Catholic Church has. In Hinduism a genuine or pseudo-monk may wander anywhere he likes and there is none to censure him or restrict his fields of activity, whereas in the Catholic discipline each soldier is stationed at a particular post and from there he has to wage the battle allotted to him.

But the really freer and pioneering fields of missionary ministry consists in propagandistic and expansionist activities of a given religion. Buddha was the foremost missionary monk, and following his example thousands of Buddhist monks and nuns have wandered forth throughout the length and breadth of the Indian subcontinent, Asian continent, going to the remotest corners of the then known world, spreading the gospel of Buddha, and making converts to the Buddhist form of religious faith and life. Monks and nuns have always been in the pioneering fields of missionary ministry. Both Buddha and Christ, the greatest missionary prophets of the world, told their disciples: "Go ye and teach." Missionary activity consists largely of the ministry of preaching. But preaching by both silent example—practical saintly living precedes

any other preaching through the spoken or written word. As Confucius said:

"The superior man acts before he speaks, and afterwards speaks according to his actions. The superior man is universally minded and no partisan. The inferior man is a partisan and not universal."

The missionaries form the spearhead shock troops of any organised religion. These vanguard pioneers are the whirlwinds of the gospel. Their dynamism in taking the message of their respective masters prepares the ground for priests to come after them and organise established churches. To an ideal missionary this entire world, this planet of ours, is the only diocese or parish he knows of, and he recognises no other canonical or parochial barrier to come in his way to work, to spread the glad tidings of human redemption. A missionary monk has a universal message for mankind. His gospel, in its basic essentials, is true for all men, for all time. This catholicity of missionary enterprise gets dimmed only when the priestly class follow up, and conquer the fields which the missionaries have won through their hard labour and struggles. Vested interests displace missionary zeal.

A missionary monk or nun is ever on the alert to keep the torch of the gospel lit bright through their personal zeal and example. He gives his all and asks nothing in return. His crucifixion becomes the necessary price for and prelude to a new resurrection of human values, with new waves of enthusiasm, earnestness and seriousness of life surging forth everywhere. Behind the missionary firebrands come the pastoral flock with their parishes and priestly ministry. As long as the priestly ministry is kept within bounds, priests strictly supervised and kept as the occupation troops of the missionary army, it serves the purpose of feeding the flock of the Lord and consolidating the missionary

conquests. But when the priestly vocation degenerates into a routine profession, the priests, instead of feeding the flock of the Lord, feed on the flock to the detriment of the spiritual and ethical life of the community. Priests, then, invent cheap devotions and popularise magical formulae and practices keeping the people away from that Enlightenment and Wisdom which was the lot of prophets and missionaries to discover and bestow upon mankind.

Priesthood, as a historical phenomenon, is more prevalent in the Semitic religions, notably in Judaism and Christianity. It was the Greek philosophical wisdom that sobered down the rigours of Jewish priestly isolationism and saved the essentials of priesthood in Christianity, thanks to the organising power and legal wisdom of the ancient Romans, which later on became the legacy of Catholic Christianity:

Even in that clear, logical and philosophic Greek mind there was seen a sort of degeneration when high religious ideals and mysteries reached the hands of priests. Plato, speaking of the degeneration of philosophic wisdom at the hands of Orphic priests, wrote in his *Republic*:

"They (priests) persuade not only individuals but whole cities that expiations and atonements for sin may be made by sacrifices and amusements which fill a vacant hour, and are equally at the service of the living and of the dead; the latter sort they call mysteries, and they redeem us from the pains of hell, but if we neglect them no one knows what awaits us."

Originally, true, genuine priestly ministry, was meant to continue the work of pioneering missionaries, to consolidate their new religious conquests and then attend to the pastoral ministry of the community. In this sense priestly function is as necessary for the spiritual life of a people as that of the missionary. But, as generations pass by, and the

churches and *sanghas* become established, there appears a tendency on the part of the priests and clergy to sit back on their armchairs, substitute philosophic wisdom with mumbling of some mechanical prayers, displace introspective and systematic meditation with cheap choral singing and hysterical devotions and self-alienating practices. The empty shell of religious organisation is hugged and ministered unto, while the kernel within empties itself out or disappears, until a new wave of religious reformation takes place and their missionaries set ablaze the old practices burning down the shell and fibre, and re-discovering the gold and the pearl in religious traditions and practices.

There is, however, one point to be stressed: the priestly ministry is as much essential for religious organisations as missionary enterprises, both being but the two sides of the same medal. In Christianity, Paul is the exemplar of missionary ministry of an ideal monk, while Peter is the typical pattern of priestly ministry. The missionary urge of a monk often clashes with the red tapism, go-slow policy and prudence of a pastor-ordained priest, or a consecrated Bishop. This opposition between the missionary and the pastor began with St Paul himself who wrote:

"Afterwards, when Cephas (Peter) came to Antioch, I opposed him openly; he stood self-condemned. He had been eating with the Gentiles prior to the coming of the delegates from James; and when these came, he began to draw back and held himself aloof, overawed by the supporters of circumcision. The rest of the Jews were no less false to their principles; Barnabas was himself carried away by their insincerity. So, when I found that they were not following the true path of the Gospel, I said to Cephas in front of them all: "Since thou art born a Jew doest thou follow the Gentile, not the Jewish way of life, by what right doest thou bind the Gentiles to live like Jews? We are Jews by right of nature, we do not come from the guilty stock of the Gentiles; yet, we found that it is through

faith in Jesus Christ, not by obeying the law, that a man was justified." —*Gal. II, 11-16* (Knox)

There is often a clash and conflict between the urge and vision of missionary ministry and the over-cautious timidity and extrovert pharisaism of organised priesthood of an established church. Christ, the foremost missionary pattern, Himself had to face the fiercest opposition from priests of his religion, the Pharisees, the Saducees and the rest. It was Caiphas, the high priest, who plotted the crucifixion of Jesus. Out of the death of Jesus, the first founder-missionary of Christian religion, there arose the first band of missionaries out of a dozen simple fishermen and simple folk, all fired and inflamed with the vision of Truth, as lived and expounded by their Master. In their footsteps came several dozens of early missionaries and propagandists whose sacrifice and zeal spread the gospel of Christ throughout the then far-flung Roman Empire.

Similarly, Buddha had to encounter the strongest opposition from the priestly class of his ancestral religion, Hinduism. The Brahmins opposed the innovations and teachings of the Buddha. In the Buddhist Pitakas there are found invectives of Buddha against the Brahmins, the priestly class of Hinduism, comparable to the condemnation of the Pharisees and the priestly class of Judaism by Christ as recorded in the synoptic Gospels.

But the missionary struggle against priesthood is not really against priesthood *per se*, but against the abuses that have crept in as a result of centuries of religious traditions and practices, when priesthood becomes an easy profession for a comfortable living, basking under the sunshine of a given religious prophet, and feeding on the sheep of the Lord through pious platitudes and a happy-go-lucky way of life.

This conflict between stereotyped priestly ministry and creative missionary dynamics is not restricted to Christianity alone. It is equally sinister and insidious in Hinduism and Buddhism, when the hereditary or established priests ostracise and crucify the missionary work of genuine monks. Swami Dayananda Saraswati, the founder of the Arya Samaj, was given poison by organised priesthood, although his superhuman and yogic powers neutralised and defeated the toxin in his system. Mahatma Gandhi, a pioneering missionary of a new era in Free India, was shot at by orthodox priesthood—for, Natures Godsey means blind orthodoxy, which made New Delhi the new Jerusalem stained by the blood of this modern Indian Socrates, this oriental Francis of Assisi, this brown Abraham Lincoln. Dr Ambedkar, the leader of the untouchables and scheduled castes of India, embraced Buddhism and brought about a million of his followers to Buddhism, after having given up the pale of Hinduism. This brave missionary adventure he had to pay with his life when sinister plots were conjured against him which finally made him enter his final rest. I have myself, as a zealous Brahmo Samajist, Buddhist idealist and Hindu Vedantist, for years fought against the caste system, Brahmin supremacy, social stratifications, child marriages and idol worship and social cancers of India, and I had to court displeasure and opposition from many quarters. Friends who were once best in the list turned out to be my enemies when I came down to brass tacks and criticised their religious obscurantism and superstitions and social cancer sanctified and consecrated by the halo of religion. Swami Vivekananda was given poison by organised priesthood. Lala Rajpat Rai was brought to a premature end. Rabindranath Tagore was branded as an "idle singer" by obscurantists. Raja

Ram Mohan Roy, the Father of Modern India and the founder of the Brahmo Samaj was ejected from his ancestral home and then ostracised from the Hindu society when he championed a pure theistic faith and purged Hinduism of superstitions and fought for social justice and female emancipation in India, fought tooth and nail against *sati*, that heartless cruel practice of burning widows on the funeral pyre of their deceased husbands. Mira Bai of Meṣwar, the theistic mystic singer of Western India, was banished from her kith and kin because she identified herself with the down-trodden and the lost.

Ostracism, excommunications, sanctions, crucifixion and death are among the penalties which missionary ministry has to face against the vested interests of priestly bureaucracy. That does not mean that always priestly ministry is at a discount and monastic ministry ever on the credit side. No; never. There are innumerable cases of priests living up to their vocation and thereby strengthening the hand of progress and truth and virtue. They are ever active, self-sacrificing, meditative and diligent to feed the sheep of the Lord. They become what they should be, viz. an *alter Christus*, literally "another Christ". *Pari passu*, a Buddhist priest who is conscious of his vocation and fulfils his ministry dutifully will be an *alter Buddha*, or a Bodhisatwa who could say:

"I have surrendered my body indifferently for the weal of the world; it is but an instrument of work that I still bear it, with all its guilt. Enough of those worldly ways! I follow in the path of the wise, remembering the discourse upon Heedlessness, and putting away sloth. To overcome the power of darkness I centre my thought, drawing the spirit away from vain paths and fixing it straightly upon its stay..." —*Shantideva's Bhodicharyatatara*

There are many priests of the pastoral clergy who in their ministry prove to be worthy disciples

of their Master, as there are many missionaries who betray their vocation and ministry by loving comforts, lusts and pleasures of the senses and wealth. It is, therefore, not any ministry as such that is at fault, but the wrong individual person who undertakes this or that ministry. It is the human nature that needs redemption, not any profession as such. When man is changed, reborn of God and Dharma, then their activities, ministry and profession are regenerated. When professional and vocational ministry are up to the mark, families and societies are regenerated, and mankind embarks upon the path of weal and progress.

I have worked as a missionary and as a priest for now about three decades. To me there is no hard and fast rule for, nor any dividing line between missionary ministry and priestly functions, both being, as I said above, but the two sides of the same medal. But, often I had to encounter opposition in my missionary activities from priests and Bishops, who speaking from the throne of God as His oracles, may stifle any missionary urge for the spread of unalloyed truth and a faith without shackles, freedom which is synonymous with God, Health and Purity.

Any monk or nun, priest or friar of an organised religion must, as a good soldier obey his captain, even when the captain goes wrong. Like the infantrymen, airmen and sailors of an organised army, the monks and nuns of organised monasteries must obey their superiors. "Theirs is not to reason why, theirs is to do and die". Having admitted the principle of obedience in performing the ministerial duties of a monk, it must be said in all fairness to the soldier on the battlefield that his individual conscience is also supreme in things relating to his and others' salvation. When the kingly or episcopal orders conflict with the basic ethics and psy-

chology of salvation, the soldier of Christ or Buddha is bound to go his way, even if he has to oppose mortal men. He can then say with St Peter: "We should obey God rather than men".

The supreme norm to be pursued in the ministerial duties of a monk or nun could be learnt from the very life and ideals of Jesus and Buddha. Embarking upon his public ministry, Jesus said:

"The spirit of the Lord is upon me. Wherefore he hath anointed me to preach the Gospel to the poor; He hath sent Me to heal the contrite of heart, to preach deliverance to the captives and sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord and the day of reward." —*Luke IV, 18.*

Buddha, announcing his forthcoming mission after his Enlightenment, told Upaka;

"I am now on my way to the city of Benares, to beat the drum of ambrosia (to set up the light of the doctrine of Nirvana, of blessed immortality) in the darkness of the world... Those indeed are conquerors who, as I have now, have conquered the intoxications (the mental intoxications, arising from ignorance, sensuality and the hankering after future life). Evil dispositions have ceased in me; therefore it is that I am a conqueror!" —*Vinaya Pit. 1.90*

Sir Edwin Arnold, in his famous *The Light of Asia*, has poetically paraphrased the song of deliverance sung by Buddha as follows:

"Many a house of life
Hath held me—seeking ever him who wrought
These prisons of senses, sorrow-fraught;
Sore was my ceaseless strife;
But now,
Thou builder of this Tabernacle—Thou!
I know Thee! Never shalt thou build again
These walls of pain,
Nor raise the roof-tree of deccits, nor lay
Fresb rafters on the clay;
Broken Thy house is, and the ridge-pole split!
Delusion fashioned it!
Safe passed I thence—deliverance to obtain."

fective children, maternity and child welfare centres, a thousand social, philanthropic and humanitarian forms of ministry spring from the same source, monasticism for the love of God and for the health of body, enlightenment of the mind and emancipation of souls.

CHAPTER VIII

MEDITATION—HINDU YOGA

"Thinking of sense-objects man becomes attached thereto. From attachment arises longing and from longing anger is born. From anger arises delusion; from delusion, loss of memory is caused. From loss of memory, the discriminative faculty is ruined and from the ruin of discrimination, a man perishes. But the self-subjugated attains peace and moves among objects with senses under control, free from any longing or aversion. In peace there is an end of all misery and the peaceful mind soon becomes well-established in wisdom. The man of steady wisdom, having subdued all senses, becomes fixed in Me, the Supreme. His wisdom is well-established whose senses are under control." —*Bhagavad Gita* II, 61-65

"Yoga is the restraining of mind-stuff from assuming modifications. At the time of concentrated meditation the seer-self abides in its own (unmodified essence...) form. Then knowledge, bereft of covering of all impurities, becomes infinite, the knowable becomes small." —*Patanjali Yoga Sutra* I, 2, 3 & IV, 30

Of all the means of perfection adopted in monasteries, none has such a paramount importance for the unfolding of the real Self within, for gaining self-knowledge and God-vision as meditation. In Hindu *Ashrams*, Buddhist *Sangha*, and in Christian monastic orders introspective meditation, meditative contemplation and contemplative union with the Divine are the foremost means prescribed by all spiritual masters and founders of monastic orders for the spiritual perfection of their followers.

But, there is a great variety in the technique of meditation adopted in monasteries. In order to understand these various methods of meditation,

as pathways towards Self-realisation, it is better to divide the chapter on meditation religionwise, instead of showing similarities and differences in the same chapter, as in the former pages. This will make the technique of meditation in each monastic religion clearer so that any aspirant or votary may choose the path that suits his or her requirements and vital needs and psycho-somatic qualities.

Within the fold of Hindu asceticism and mysticism there are so many shades of meditation, ranging from the introspective monistic consciousness of the famous Vedantic realisational dictum: *Brahmasi*—"I am Brahman" or *Tatvamasi*—"Thou art That", to the grossest forms of extrovert anthropomorphism. But in all these meditational practices among the monks, *sadhus* and *sanyasins* of Hinduism, there is a common root which is known as Yoga. The classical religious and philosophic concept of Yoga is derived from the terse aphorisms of Patanjali. The world-famous yoga system of meditation, concentration and Self-realisation is summed up by Patanjali in four chapters. The first chapter has only fifty-one aphorisms, the second consists of fifty-five aphorisms, the third chapter has fifty-six and the fourth chapter has only thirty-three aphorisms. Based on these pithy, weighty and sublime aphorisms the entire yoga system of philosophy, religion and mystic monasticism are built up. Of the various subdivisions of the Yoga system, the *Hatha Yoga* aims at the perfection of physical body in its strength, beauty, vitality and longevity. The *Jnana Yoga* aims at the perfection of the intellect and mind through knowledge of the world, man and the Absolute. The *Bhakti Yoga* aims at the perfection of human will, purification and perfection of human affections and love through directing love on God and things divine. The *Karma Yoga* seeks perfection in external activity, social ser-

vice, missionary enterprise and all outward social, economic and political activities by making them God-guided, Self-realised dynamics. But in all these four main branches of the Yoga system, there is one underlying thread that unifies them all, and that is Self-realisation through a systematic process of self-control, self-purification and self-knowledge, all achieved mainly through the torchlight of introspective meditation.

The Yoga system, in common with all esoteric forms of introspective meditation, acknowledges that Self is enveloped in various sheaths, as it were, which needs peeling like an onion. Outer sheaths are grosser as are all our bodily activities, while deeper down in human consciousness are found subtler forms of activities, immaterial in essence. The sheaths of the body are grosser, and hence they are known as *sthula sharira* or grosser material, and hence ponderable, while the sheaths enveloping the soul are made up of subtler matter and hence they are called *sukshma sharira*. This Indian concept finds it parallel in the theory of primeval matter, bifurcating into corporeal matter and spiritual matter, as it is found in the philosophy of Neo-Platonists, St Augustine, Origen and many Christian mystics.

Matter, therefore, is the universal receptacle of forms. The indeterminate *materia prima* become this or that object through receiving the *substantial form* of this or that species. Only God is excluded from the composition of matter and form. The tentacles of subtler forms of matter encasing the soul of man are with greater difficulty snapped than the obvious grosser forms of body and bodily life. It is with a view to unsheathing one by one all the grosser and finer layers of body and Nature from the Self and realise that Self beyond the clouds of emotions, lusts and passions, that a monk embarks

upon the path of meditation, adopting one or other of various beaten tracks bequeathed to him by various yogis, saints and mystics of India. Or he may plough the virgin fields of his soul, and find out a technique of meditation just suited to him, often so individualised that none else could pursue that path exactly in the same way. These uncharted paths of meditation are found in such spiritual giants and uncanonical monk-saints like Sri Ramkrishna Paramhansa, the seer that taught and inspired Swami Vivekananda to found the Ramakrishna Mission Order of monks.

Even when monks chalk out paths of their own, they have very many essentials in common with monks anywhere and everywhere, the essentials such as turning the torch of self-knowledge inwards, their firm resolution to bring passions and emotions under the strict control of reason and conscience, their yearning to reach the summits of the Divine, their Self-emptying and re-filling their hearts with the divine Self. If Paul could say: "It is no more I, but it is Christ that liveth in me," then every genuine monk could say, "it is not I, but God that lives and works in me."

It is through the meditative aspect of Yoga that Hindu *sanyasins* and monks enter this pilgrimage from the outer sheaths to the inner self of man. From the skin-deep ephemeral pleasures, through meditation a monk penetrates various conscious levels of the soul and reaches the sanctuary of the Self wherein he discovers the secret of true, lasting and perennial happiness. Pursuing the skin-deep pleasures of sense and sex, one discovers that his pleasures swiftly pass away while their pains endure, their sham shallow happiness vanishes while their miseries last. With the same eyes of introspective meditation based on his own experiences, he realises that the pains for the conquest of soul-deep hap-

piness pass away while their joys endure, the tensions and struggles for the conquest of virtues are trifles compared to the inner poise, power and ecstasy derived therefrom. The distinction between virtue and vice is now crystal-clear to him, even when he transcends the boundaries of good and evil, truth and untruth and other relative opposites.

The seeds of a saint or a sinner are already implanted in us. All the differences which we see in the world of men and women is nothing but the growth and outgrowth of either of these two seeds. Vice and virtue cannot co-exist in the same individual, because they are diametrically opposed to each other like light and darkness. This opposition we can transcend only in reaching, realising and relishing the Absolute, where the relative opposites cease to exist. God, as the "Thou" of a prayerful soul, is good. God, as the Absolute, is beyond good, *super-bonum super-ens*, as Dionysius puts it. The Yoga system of meditation and Self-realisation speaks of *sukla* and *krishna*, white and black tendencies and instincts in man. Sin, ignorance, unruly and wild passions and emotions such as lust, greed, jealousy, etc. belong to our black, dark, animal breed, while virtue, knowledge and power belong to the brighter part of our being, to the angelic and divine in man. The tiger and ape in man is not to be killed, but tamed, so that passions and emotions may be sublimated and made instrumental to the spirit in man like the elephants, tigers, bears and lions tamed and disciplined and utilised by circus staff.

Monasteries and hermitages are the places where a suitable environment is created for the practice of meditation. From immemorial past, Hindu thinkers, sages and seers, wishing to solve the riddle of life and death, misery and happiness, have repaired to the solitude and silence of the

mighty Himalayas and there they created their own hermitages, monasteries, *ashrams* and even forest universities. This tradition of withdrawal from the busy turmoil of cities and worldly life, and retiring to suitable mountain tops and luxuriant jungles with a view to meditating and concentrating upon the fundamental problems of life and finding solutions for them are shared not only by the Hindus, but also by the Buddhists, the Jains, the Sikhs and other daughter-religions that sprang from the bosom of Hinduism. Buddha himself says to his disciples:

"Have you never heard it said by wanderers who were venerable, aged, your teachers and the teachers of your teachers about the ancient Arhants, Buddhas and so forth who sought the remote and lonely recess of the forest, where noise and sound are hardly heard, where the breezes from the pasturelands flow, places which were safely hidden from the eyes of men, meet for *self-communion*, even as I do now?" —*Dīgha Nikāya*, III, 54

Self-communion is the nearest word that expresses the experience monks gain in the time of meditation. It is in the moments of self-communion the distinction between self and non-self appears clear to our minds. It is then that we attain insight into the world of values and realities, as opposed to the fleeting show of phenomena perceived by the sense-bound world.

In monasteries, Hindu, Buddhist or Christian meditation, as self-communion, is compulsory for all the inmates. The cell of a monk, a hermitage, a lonely spot in a jungle or by seaside or riverside silence, or any other suitable lonely, solitary and silent spot may be chosen for the purpose of meditation. When perfection in the art of meditation is reached, one can habitually meditate even when he is engripped in the busiest engagements of modern life. In the natural surroundings up in the hills and mountains, by the side of flowing rivers

and roaring seas, one is more induced to meditation rather than by living in man-built skyscrapers and stone-built temples.

Next to environment, what is important in meditation for a Hindu monk is the posture of body, commonly known as *asana*. Patanjali, the philosopher who systematised the Indian practices of Yoga in his famous aphorisms, simply says: *Stirasughamasanam*—"Asana is any posture which is firm and comfortable". But based on the bodily postures a fully-developed branch of Yoga has come into existence, the *Hatha Yoga* which attends to the physical development of man, convinced as the yogis are, that a healthy mind works only in a healthy body. Meditation, worth the name, is impossible in a weak, sickly body. In fact, diseases of the body are hindrances to Yoga.

The *Hatha Yoga Pradipika*, the textbook on physical development of body, has this to say with regard to the fruits reaped by the correct practice of the correct *asanas*. It says:

"Slim body, joyous face, sonorous voice, sparkling eyes, positive good health, virility, exuberance of vitality and radiance and purification of the nervous system are among the results resulting from the practice of Hatha Yoga."

—III, 78

Yogic meditation, at its best, is at once Self-realisation for the soul and soundest health for the body. It is truer to say that through a process of yogic discipline and meditation the health of the soul flows into the body revitalising it from within, than to say that the health of the body overflows into the soul making it healthy and strong. This is because body is just the vehicle of the spirit, its temple, its sanctuary. True bodily health is not produced as much with drugs and diet as with right mental attitudes and higher stages of spiritual unfoldment of the Self from within. Now the yogic meditation, its *asanas* and its eightfold discipline

are all meant to produce health and growth for the whole human personality composed of body, mind and spirit. This integral vision of yogic unfoldment excludes any kind of compartmental view of the health of body divorced from the health of soul, or of the soul divorced from the life of the Over-soul. In this organic and integrated development of the whole human personality—and not of soul, body, mind or will-power compartmentally—meditation serves as the torchlight for the mind and spirit, *asanas* as physical education, *pranayama* as psychic control, and *samadhi* as Self-realised bliss.

The Bhagavad Gita in its sixth chapter gives us in a few verses the quintessence of meditation in Hindu monasticism and philosophy. Yoga is the highest stage of Hindu monasticism; and the soul and spirit of yoga is meditation, concentration, contemplation and Self-realised bliss. The Gita says:

"The Yogi should constantly practice concentration of the heart, remaining in seclusion alone, subduing his body and mind and being free from longing and possession. In a cleanly spot having established his seat firmly, neither too high nor too low, with a cloth, skin and *kusha* grass, placed one on the other; being seated there, keeping the mind one-pointed and subduing the activities of mind and senses, let him practise yoga for self-purification. Let him hold his body, head and neck erect and motionless, fixing the gaze on the tip of his nose not looking anywhere around.

Being serene-hearted and fearless, ever steadfast in the vow of life-long eelibacy and controlling the mind, let him sit steadfastly absorbed in thoughts of Me, regarding Me as his supreme goal. Thus ever keeping himself steadfast, the Yogi of subdued mind attains eternal peace and freedom which abide in Me.

But O Arjuna, the yogic practice is not for him who eats too much or who does not eat at all, nor for him who sleeps too much or keeps (long) vigils. He who is moderate in eating and recreation, moderate in his efforts in work, moderate in sleep and wakefulness (will discover that the practice of) Yoga becomes the destroyer of all miseries.

When the mind completely subdued, rests in Self alone, free from longing for all objects of desire, then he is said to be a *Yukta* (steadfast in knowledge). As a lamp placed in a windless spot does not flicker, the same simile is used to define a *Yogi* of subdued mind, practising union with the Self. In that state, when the mind is completely subdued by the practice of *Yoga* and has attained serenity, in that state, seeing Self by self, he is satisfied in Self alone. In that state transcending the senses, he feels that infinite bliss which is perceived by the purified understanding; knowing that and being established therein, he never falls back from his real state of Self-knowledge; after having attained which, no other gain seems greater; being established wherein, he is not overwhelmed even with great sorrow. Know that state of separation from the contact with pain as *Yoga*. This *yoga* should be practised with perseverance and undepressed heart.

Abandoning without reserve all the desires born of mental fancies, and restraining completely by the mind the entire group of senses from all directions, with understanding held by firmness, and mind established in the Self, let him by degrees attain tranquillity, let him not think of anything else.

Wheresoever the restless and unsteady mind may wander away let him withdraw it from there and bring it under the control of the Self alone. He whose passions are quietened and mind made perfectly tranquil, he who has become one with *Brahman*, being freed from all impurities, to such a *yogi* comes the supreme bliss. . . Thus constantly, holding the mind steadfast, the *yogi*, whose sins are shaken off, easily attains the infinite bliss born of contact with *Brahman*. He whose heart is steadfastly engaged in *yoga*, looks everywhere with his eyes of equality, seeing the Self in all beings and all beings in the Self. He who sees Me in all and all in Me from him I vanish not, nor does he vanish from Me." —*Gita* VI, 10-30

Of all the various limbs of *Yoga*, *sadhana* or meditation and *samadhi* or ecstatic trance in bliss are the most important for which the *asanas* or bodily postures and *pranayama* or psychic control are just an indispensable preparation. It is in the state of meditation, or in our union with the Over-soul, with God, that we realise that we are thereby raised

above our selves. When with God we are more than ourselves. When left to ourselves we are just ourselves. When we are with men and other things we become less ourselves. This truth we can experience for ourselves. When we are in communion with our real Self, with God, with the Cosmic Mind, the Over-soul, we certainly rise superior to ourselves. Then the tiger and ape in us lie dormant or even disappear. It is only in introspective meditation without uplifting us to Deity and without lowering ourselves with men and other things, that we are on par with our own selves. This is the blessed state of solitary bliss, eremitical bliss and monastic trance. But when we are engaged in social action, in works of mercy and philanthropy for the welfare of ourselves and others—for we never do good to others without thereby doing good to our own sweet selves, even though we may not always be conscious of it—we seem to sink lower than our real selves. When we converse with another man, we seem to lose a bit of our own self; while addressing a meeting or responding to their queries we seem to be lesser ourselves than when we are alone with our own Self. In a crowd we are almost lost to our conscious selves. That is the reason why prophets, seers and philosophers, after engaging themselves in apostolic labours for the welfare and salvation of others, repaired at night and spent hours in silent communion with God or Self in order to regain their lost energy and re-charge their batteries.

In all the classical forms of meditation, in common with the Yoga technique of meditation, we have the entire spiritual practice for Self-realisation systematised into eight distinct parts. As Patanjali puts it:

“By the practice of the different parts of Yoga, the impurities being destroyed, knowledge becomes effulgent up to

discrimination. *Yama*, *Niyama*, *Asana*, *Pranayama*, *Pratyahara*, *Dharana*, *Dhyana* and *Samadhi*, are the eight limbs of Yoga." —*Yoga Aphorisms* II, 28, 29

For the full-fledged spiritual unfoldment of the inner Self, and attainment of Cosmic consciousness and beatific vision of God, the disciplined and faithful practice of meditation, as systematised in Yoga, is essential. All these are common practices for the entire Hindu-Buddhist world. Under different names and forms Christian monasticism also hinges on the essentials of Yoga. For this reason, we may now dwell for a while explaining the eight "limbs" of Yoga.

Patanjali says:

"Non-killing, truthfulness, non-stealing, continence and non-receiving (of gifts) are called *Yama*. These are universal vows, never to be broken by time, place, or under any other circumstance.

"Internal and external purification, contentment, mortification, study and worship of God are *Niyama*."

—*Yoga* II, 30-32

Asana, as we stated above, is the bodily posture for meditation or for physical exercise. Among the *asanas* recommended for meditation, *padmasana*, *virasana* and *sirasana* are the most common and more important. Of these *padmasana* consists in squatting in erect posture, keeping the right foot on the left thigh, and placing the left foot on the right thigh. The hand should be crossed and head, neck and body kept erect in perpendicular, and the eyes turned to the tip of the nose or remaining closed. This *padmasana* posture, when joined to *pranayama* or psychic control through the regulation of breathing, is highly beneficial for concentrating the mind and meditating on any subject desired. I had myself practised this posture for the last thirty years and to me, at any rate, it is the very best posture for me-

itation and introspective vision of the inner world, and its reflection in the outer cosmos.

Virasana—etymologically meaning virile posture—consists in placing each foot under the thigh on the opposite side while squatting with head and neck erect in perpendicular position. *Sirasana* consists in standing on one's head with only the hands on the ground to support the whole body, raised with feet up and the head resting on the ground or on a pillow. For those who due to obesity, old age or physical defects cannot stand straight on their heads, the same purpose is served by standing on their head, but slightly inclining towards a wall or against beds on which they can prop up their body. The main purpose of inflow of blood direct from the heart to the brains is achieved which is the chief objective of *sirasana*. To begin with, one may start with a few minutes which could be extended to even an hour. I have not been able to practice *sirasana* for more than twenty minutes at a stretch. But I know of persons who could stand on their heads for almost two hours at a stretch. But, then, they have to rest longer, lying on their beds or on the ground after the practice in order to overcome the feeling of giddiness which one feels as he gets up from *sirasana*. But in all these postures, the best results are achieved when the mind is disciplined, and it remains absorbed in meditation on divine and supramundane objects beyond sense-perception.

The Hindu system of meditation, in art and history, has been the most poised and the deepest. One of the aids for this profoundest and prolonged type of meditation and ecstasy is what the Yoga calls *pranayama*—which literally means regulated control over the breath. Our minds are thrown into vibrations through the breathing process. Our minds assume the form of the objects thought

of, like a white linen towel becomes red by dipping it in red paint, blue by dipping it in blue colour, and takes any other colour according to the hue dipped in. By thinking and meditating on things divine our mind become divine, according to the Upanishadic dictum: *Brahmarid Brahmya bhavati* — "by knowing Brahman one becomes like Brahman". Now the role of psychic control of breath consists precisely in steadying the mind through deep breathing and retaining vital breath as long as one can. Through a process of systematic disciplining it has been found possible to retain the breath for hours, days and even months, keeping the mind in a state of continuous trance and ecstasy resulting from undisturbed meditation. The yogic hibernation makes it possible to bury a genuine adept who can return to life afterwards. It is through meditation, *Dhyana*, that a Hindu monk taps at the almost limitless possibilities inlaid in man. Miracles are possible because man does not live by bread alone. The bread of life for the spirit of man is idea, ideals, the *Logos*, the *Chit*, God, the Absolute. And from this supernal sustenance and by tapping at the limitless reservoir of the spirit of man flow all the so-called miracles, miracles of Science and miracles of Faith, miracles of philosophy and religion. In 1942, in the first week of July, the *New York Herald Tribune* published a factual account of a Yogi in meditation, buried alive under publicly tested conditions, and returning to life again after six months of hibernation underneath the earth! That is the result of *samadhi* or meditational ecstasy combined with perfect *pranayama* or regulated control of breath.

When I was living up in the Himalayas I came across at least two Hindu monks who could sit in meditation for full four hours. I could notice the radiant face they acquired after they woke up

from the trance of meditation. Yes, the face is always the index of the mind. They seem to suffer the loss of undisturbed joy of meditation as they climb down to the mundane plane of having to deal with people and the world. In Kalimpong, in the Darjeeling district of Bengal, I knew a Hindu nun who had the power to tell the past history of a person and predict his future immediately after her meditation. On one morning I happened to join her congregation. She turned to me and said, "You have been a monk, you shall by your very nature remain a monk, in spite of the present clouds passing in your mind. Do not get mixed up with politics. Go farther. You are a propagandist. Stick to your vocation." Saying this she turned to others, one after another, telling them what Concerned *them*.

Pratyahara is the power to withdraw at will the senses from their respective sense-objects, e.g. eyes from coloured objects, ears from audible objects, etc. The Gita explains this as follows:

"The man of steady wisdom, having subdued them all becomes fixed in Me, the Supreme. His wisdom is well-established whose senses are under control. Thinking of sense-objects, man becomes attached thereto. From attachment arises longing and from longing anger is born. From anger arises delusion; from delusion loss of memory is caused. From loss of memory, the discriminative faculty is ruined, and from the ruin of discrimination a man perishes. But the self-subjugated attains peace and moves among objects with the sense under control free from any longing or aversion. In peace there is an end of all misery and the peaceful mind soon becomes established in wisdom." —*Gita*, II, 61-65

By analysing the psychology of yogic meditation one should not get away with the idea that it is all an uphill task of self-effort with no caressing winds of divine grace. The supernatural element is also recognised in Yoga when devotion

to God—*iswara-prindhandva*—is clearly set forth as one of the paths. The yogic meditation is a double-edged sword which can cut across both ways. Yoga cuts the natural with the supernatural sword when we are carried away to the summits of beatific vision and undisturbed bliss by God's grace and, at the same time, it cuts across the supernatural through the sword of the natural when our souls are dry and our minds have to traverse through the desert sands of aridity, doubts, failures, misfortunes and calamities, which are to be borne not only with a sort of Stoic imperturbability and philosophic calm, but also through the flavour and sweetness of divine consolations which come into the heart of a genuine monk communing with God through meditation.

Yama, as mentioned earlier, consists in taking the five-fold vows of *satya*—Truth, *asteya*—non-stealing, *ahimsa*—non-violence, *brahmacharya*—continence and *aprigraha*—non-possession. The fruits that accrue to any one who faithfully and steadfastly observes these five vows are tersely mentioned by Patanjali when he said:

"Non-violence being established, in his presence all forms of enmities cease (even before wild animals, serpents and bandits). When truthfulness is fully established, the yogi monk gets the power of attaining for himself and others the fruits of works without (actually performing) the works. By the establishment of non-stealing all wealth comes to the monk. When continence is firmly established attainment of great energy is gained. When non-possession is well-established, one gains the memory of past lives."

—Yoga II, 35-39

It is by virtue of the practice of *ahimsa*—which means non-violence in its negative sense, whereas in positive sense it means benevolence, love or charity—that a Francis of Assisi could tame the wolf of Gubbio, that even today some enlightened monks wander forth in the densest forests of the Hima-

layas in the presence of tigers and cobras without being hurt. Each vow, when observed fully and faithfully, yields fruits which are summarily mentioned in Patanjali's Yoga Sutras.

Niyama means "internal and external purification, contentment, mortification, study, and worship of God".—Yoga II. 32. Bodily and spiritual purification; inward contentment and inner poise, mortification of flesh even to the point of crucifixion of the ass, tiger and pig in man, assiduous study of scriptures and philosophic lore, and resignation to the will of God and communion with the Over-soul are in brief the *niyamas* recommended in Yoga for meditation and Self-realisation. As the saintly Fr Zacharias, O.C.D., my old professor at Alwaye Seminary, says:

"It is an axiom among the Yoga philosophers that only men of pure heart and clear understanding, whose minds are not tainted with impurities, whose intellects are not vitiated by evil thoughts, can realise spiritual truth; hence their earnest endeavour to provide men with means of perfect purification." —*Outline of Hinduism*, p. 249.

The three last disciplines of Yoga form, as it were, the kernel of Hindu system of meditation, while all the other five 'limbs' are the shell to protect and perfect the kernel of meditation, contemplation and ecstatic bliss resulting from Self-realisation.

"*Dharana* is holding the mind on to some particular object."—Patanjali III. 1. *Dharana* means choosing a particular subject and focussing our mind, attention and spirit on to it, to the exclusion of everything else. This can be achieved only with constant practice, earnestness and vigilance so that the weeds may not grow in our minds, but only the cultivated flowers and fruits grow in the garden of our soul.

∴ *Dhyana*—or meditation proper—"is the un-

broken flow of knowledge in and around the object concentrated upon" (III. 2). To an ordinary mind words like man, skies, flowers, gods, angels, etc. mean nothing more than their dictionary meaning. But to a man of meditation words are worlds. In meditation all the depths of these worlds unfold themselves in their true nature and colour, as opposed to the sham, skin-deep superficial knowledge of things by the rabble and common man in the street. To know what is what with a high degree of discrimination, and to gauge everything *sub specie aeternitatis*, is easier said than done. Yet, through the search-light of meditation we penetrate behind the veil and see things as they are, and not as they seem to us. The difference between the world of Reality and the world of appearance becomes distinct.

The final, superconscious and supernatural stage of Self-realisation is reached in *samadhi* which is the ecstatic vision of the Absolute, and of the vision of the created universe with objects therein lit through the Absolute. All the created things "live, move and have their being in God", as St Paul puts it. The vision which St Paul refers to in his second epistle to the Corinthians is the *samadhi* of the first order. He says:

"There is a man I know who was carried out of himself in Christ, fourteen years since; was his spirit in his body? I cannot tell. Was it apart from his body? I cannot tell; God knows. This man, at least, was carried up into the third heaven. I can only tell you that this man, with his spirit in his body, or with his spirit apart from his body, God knows which, not I, was carried up into Paradise, and heard mysteries which man is not allowed to utter."

—II Cor., 12, 2-5

Moses had the *Samadhi* of the first order on Mount Sinai when he saw God and heard His voice. The unique mission which Moses had to fulfil as the leader, saviour and legislator of the Jewish

people could have been undertaken only after he was strengthened with the vision of God. Of Moses it is written:

"There arose not a prophet since in Israel like unto Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face, in all the signs and wonders, which the Lord sent him to do in the Land of Egypt to Pharaoh." —Deut., XXIV, 10

In *samadhi* resulting from *dhyana* or meditation, there is the contemplative aspect and the dynamic aspect. In contemplative *samadhi* there is just the vision of Reality, of which but a distant echo, shadow or ripple is the universe. But dynamic *samadhi* is that of the prophets who had led men to action, to revolution of the spirit in moral and ethical life of the people, to the reversal of values in social, economic and political life. In the contemplative *samadhi* or trance there is a kind of habitual union of the soul with God through beatific vision even while on earth; in mystic trance there is union of the soul with God at will, whenever an active man, engaged in God's work on earth, wants to uplift himself to God and remain there from time to time in order to receive orders from the Most High, to receive strength and inspiration to wage the battles of life, and lead himself and many others to the harbour of peace and bliss, towards Self-realisation. Sri Ramakrishna says:

"There are two other kinds of *samadhi*. First the *stila samadhi*, when the aspirant totally loses outer consciousness: he remains in that state for a long time, it may be for many days. Second, the *unmana samadhi*: it is to withdraw the mind suddenly from all sense-objects and unite it with God."

In contemporary Hinduism, perhaps, none has realised and expounded contemplative meditation and *samadhi* better than Ramakrishna Paramahansa. This God-intoxicated man was often found in a state of *samadhi*. His life was itself realisation of the Absolute. It is out of the fringe

of the soul of Self-realised Ramakrishna that Swami Vivekananda (1862—1902) and the members of the Ramakrishna Mission Order of monks he founded derive their inspiration and strength. Ramakrishna narrates his experience of contemplative bliss in these words:

“Ah, what a state of mind I passed through! My mind would lose itself in the Indivisible Absolute. How many days I spent that way! I renounced *Bhakti* and *Bhakta*—devotion and devotees. I became inert. I could not feel the form of my own head. I was about to die. I thought of keeping Ramlal’s aunt near me. I ordered the removal of all pictures and portraits from my room. When I regained outer consciousness, when the mind climbed down to the ordinary level, I felt as if I were being suffocated like a drowning person. At last I said to myself, ‘If I can’t bear people, how then shall I live?’ Then my mind was again directed to devotion and devotees...”

You see, there is a vast difference between soul and God: Through worship and austerity, a soul can at the utmost attain samadhi; but he cannot come down from that state. On the other hand an incarnation of God can come down from samadhi. The soul is like an officer of the king; he can go as far as the outer court of the seven-storey palace; but the king’s son has access to all the seven floors. He can also go outside. Everyone says that he cannot come down from the plane of samadhi. In that case, how do you account for sages like Sankara and Ramanuja? They retained the ‘ego of knowledge’.

A man cannot be egotistic if he has true knowledge. In other words, in samadhi man becomes one with God and gets rid of his egotism. True knowledge is impossible without samadhi. In samadhi man becomes one with God. Then he can have no egotism. Do you know what it is like? Just at noon the sun is directly overhead. If you look around then, you do not see your shadow. Likewise, you will not find the shadow of ego after attaining Knowledge in samadhi. But if you see a trace of ‘I-consciousness’ after attainment of true knowledge, then know that it is either ‘the ego of knowledge’ or the ‘ego of devotion’ or the ‘servant ego’. It is never the ‘ego of ignorance’.

—*Gospel of Ramakrishna*, pp. 746-747

In Hinduism, the paths of meditation and Self-realisation are many and varied, hinging on the dictum: "As many men, so many paths."

The technique of meditation as expounded in Yoga is the climax of Indian spirituality. This Hindu technique is known as *Dhyana Yaga* or the Yoga of Meditation. It is through this type of meditation that one attains *samaāhi* or absorption into the life-love-bliss of the Infinite. With that a man becomes free, emancipated, *mukta*. This spiritual emancipation is imperfect as long as we are in the body. This emancipation attainable on this earth is known as *Jivanmukti*, which has close resemblance to what St Thomas Aquinas calls "imperfect beatitude". After our physical death, with no trammels and association with grosser body, the spirit attains its perfect freedom. This is known in India as *videhamukti*—emancipation after death. In Thomistic philosophy it is known as "perfect beatitude".

An ideal Hindu monk, living in isolation, or state of *kaivalya*, from mundane life, lives, however, in constant communion with his better Self. Meditation is both the doorway to enter the *sancta sanctorum* of divinity that is inherent, immanent and potential in us, and it is at once the quiescent beatific bliss in the Infinite. Something akin to this Hindu technique of meditation is expressed by Schelling when he said:

"In all of us there dwells a secret, marvellous power of freeing ourselves from the changes of time, of withdrawing our secret selves away from external things, and so of discovering ourselves the Eternal in us in the form of unchangeability... This intellectual presentation occurs when we cease to be our own object, when, withdrawing into ourselves, the perceiving image merges in the Self perceived."

Even the summits of German idealistic philosophy of Self-realisation are just the European Alps compared to the Asian Himalayas of non-dualistic monism as realised by both the Vedantists and the Yogins through a process of systematic meditation. Sadhu Santhinath, a Hindu monk of great repute in modern India, has thus described his experience of meditation along the Hindu roads. He says:

"I began my spiritual career at the very dawn of my youth. I practised Bhakti Sadhana (the practice of devotion, reverence and love of God with a sincere faith in His omnipotence, omniscience and mercy) for ten years; some forms of Yoga-Sadhana (the practices of *pranayama* or breath control) for three years, and meditation according to the non-dualistic Vedantic method for about twelve years. As a result of the continuous practice of meditation, I was able to attain the state of trance, in which I could, according to my judgment realise or intuit the object of my contemplation. In consequence of the prolonged concentration of attention and energy, I used to attain to a still deeper state of trance, in which, as I could remember or infer after my waking, I became totally unaware of myself, the act of meditation and the said object. After a long experience of these two types of the *samadhi* state, a strong impression got hold of my mind that I had found the ultimate Reality. During the major part of this long period of the incessant practice of meditation, I passed days and nights almost without a break in a sitting posture in a secluded spot, seldom lay on a bed or took rest, had what might be called an apology for sleep only for an hour or two in the same sitting posture, took no physical exercise, had no conversation with anybody and paid little attention to the bodily health. The brain was in a strained condition on account of the incessant struggling effort at concentration. For this indifference to the physical necessities and excessive strain on the brain, I was attacked by a severe pain in the head. In order to divert my attention and thereby to be relieved of pain I gave some attention to the study of philosophy. *Thoughts like these I could not reconcile with the notion about my immediate experience of the true Reality, and they forced me to change my conviction about Truth-realisation. I found that what I took for objective Reality was not really connected with any independent entity, but*

with an idea which was subjective, internal, personal. What was seen or intuited in the state of deep meditation was dependent on thought and experience; it was made of forms of thought and regulated according to nature of thought. Thus I reached the conclusion that what passes for Truth-realisation is not really so, but it is the visualisation of our concept and purely individualistic."

Now this account is demonstrative of the hardships the Hindu monks undergo in quest of truth through the traditional path of meditation, discipline and renunciation. It also tells us of the absolute freedom for the monks—who, by their very profession, transcend the limitations of caste rules and social conventions and orthodox religions—to arrive at their own conclusions based on their own individual experiences. Some monks become atheistic, others agnostics, a third group annihilationists and anarchists, while others remain theists, monists or monotheists. And the sheltering wings of Hinduism accommodate them all, as a mother hen her chickens, no matter of what colour or size they may be. While Sadhu Santhinath, as the result of his meditations became a subjectivist, the mystical experiences of Indian monks like Vivekananda, Swami Ramathirtha, Swami Dayananda Saraswati and others led them to the orthodox position in Vedanta metaphysics and Yoga meditation. A Ramakrishna, a Mahatma Gandhi or a Rabindranath Tagore reached at the objective Reality subjectively realised as Self-realised bliss. Santhinath could not see the link and identity between the subjective and objective realised in samadhi. *Tatvamasi*—"Thou art That" is the last word in Vedantic realisation of human self in the cosmic Self. If there is just one aphorism on which the entire Indian ontology and religious realisation rests, it is this "Thou art That". In monistic philosophy the meaning of these words is to be taken literally, as God is the one single Rea-

lity without a second, and *Thou art That*. But in theistic interpretation there is a dualism between "I" and "Thou", and this position is nearer Christian orthodox position.

I have myself dabbled into various systems of Hindu technique of meditation as an aid to Self-realisation. When I was in Bengal, besides the Vedanta and Yoga systems, I got interested in *Sakti Sadhana* (the cult of Power of God, creative power in manifold forms) *Tantra* and the *Shaiva Sidhanta*, both as philosophy and as religion. After some twenty years of experience in this field, I have now come to the conclusion that the Vedanta philosophy, in its pure non-dualistic form, satisfied the needs of my brains, and the Yoga, as means to Self-realisation, satisfies the needs of my heart. These are my two wings, as it were, which enable me to soar higher into the inaccessible summits of God. The Yoga-Vedanta is the mainspring that can bring me down, lower and lower to the levels of the lowliest underdogs, have-nots and street urchins for whom my die is cast, and my apostolate of mercy is being exercised for the last decade or more.

For several months I attempted at concentrated meditation with a view to penetrating the veil of *Maya* or relativity, and reaching the Absolute, the *Satya*. I cannot say I have reached Truth; but I am untrue to myself if I did not acknowledge certain glimpses into the Eternal in moments of imperfect *samadhi*. Then we lose hold on our bodies and earthly existence, and our bodies themselves become vehicles of the translucent light of the Real. But these few glimpses are enough for us to hold aloft the torch of faith in Reality, in the Absolute, in God. Now I know that the pathway to God is not high philosophy, erudition or scholarship, but a simple, pure, sincere quest after God, with implicit faith and filial trust in Him. Medi-

tation, specially that one-pointed and single-minded devotion, by degrees, through failures and successes, disappointments and inspirations, can lead us on to the sanctuary of God-bliss.

God realised through the Hindu technique of meditation is the Universal I, the "I AM WHO AM". This God transcends personality, and the impersonal Subtle Essence of all Creation is perceived with absolute certainty, more certain than our ordinary "I am", or the Cartesian: "I think, and hence I am". This meditational realisation can take us to the point of identification of our true Self with the Absolute, which, in religious language Jesus expressed when he said: "I and my Father are one." Ontologically, the Upanishads state this realisation in the *Mahavakya*—Great Dictum: TATVAMASI —THOU ART THAT.

Through meditation alone comes self-knowledge. Through self-knowledge alone there is self-purification, through self-purification alone there is Self-realisation, which consists in the identification of our self with the Universal Self, beyond our individual body, mind, intellect and ego which all belong to the perishable part of our existence, all bubbles on the evanescent transient flux that is the universe and parts thereof. Though meditation we discriminate between the body and soul, temporal and eternal, purify our hearts from passions and white heat of individual cravings, and thus we reach the bosom of God whose kingdom is within human consciousness, in the inner sanctuary of soul.

CHAPTER IX

MEDITATION—CHRISTIAN TECHNIQUE

Meditation purifies (the source, that is,) the mind from which it springs. Then it governs the affections, directs the acts, corrects the excesses, regulates the conduct, brings purity and order into the life of him who practises it; finally, it confers knowledge of human and divine things."

—*St Bernard (De Consideratione, Bk. I, Chap. VII)*

"Jesus retired into the desert and prayed...He passed the whole night in the prayer of God."

—*Luke V, 16 & VI, 12*

"Then shall thy light break forth as the morning and thy health shall speedily arise and thy justice shall go before thy face and the glory of the Lord shall gather thee up. Thou shalt call and the Lord shall hear; thou shalt cry and He shall say: 'Here I am'. And the Lord will give thee rest continually and will fill thy soul with brightness and deliver thy bones, and thou shalt be like a watered garden, and like a fountain of water and whose waters do not fail."

—*Isias LVIII, 8, 9, 11*

In Christian spirituality there is not a single practice which is of greater importance for obtaining the knowledge and love of God than meditation. Mental prayer, interior life, self-recollection, inwardness, self-possession, contemplation, beatific vision, etc. are but different names, degrees or aspects of meditation.

For monks, nuns and priests, for the trainees in the seminaries and study houses, daily meditation for at least an hour is compulsory. The Rules and Constitutions of each monastic order for both monk and nuns emphasise the practice of meditation as the most important of all exercises for reaching the

summits of Christian perfection. As St Pope Pius X has rightly said: "No priest can omit daily meditation without being guilty of serious negligence and to the detriment of his soul" (Exhortation to the Clergy, VI. 2).

First, let it be observed that in Christianity meditation means any concentrated thought on God or things divine, any thought or imagination that enables us to lift up our hearts to God, any form of contemplation from the lowest grade of anthropomorphism to the highest super-rational, supernatural, ecstatic contemplation of the Divine Essence. St Thomas Aquinas distinguishes six types of meditational contemplation, while explaining the six degrees of contemplation described by Richard de Sancto Victore. Aquinas says:

"The six degrees through which man ascends to the contemplation of God from creatures are as follows. In the first stage there is mere perception of the sensible world; in the second stage there is a progressive step from sensible things to the contemplation of the intelligible world; in the third, there is a sort of evaluation of the sensible world in the light of the intelligible world; in the fourth stage, there is only meditation on the objects of the intelligible world, as known and reached from the sense-bound world. In the fifth stage of meditation there is abidance of the mind in spiritual things which are never known through senses, but could only be grasped with the intellect. In the sixth stage of meditation we dwell on spiritual subjects, on the contemplation of the Divine, which cannot be known or understood by reason. This last stage is the sublime peak of contemplation of the Divine, in which contemplation reaches its utmost perfection."

—(II-IIae. 130 ad 3. Author's Free Translation)

In Christianity, specially in monasteries and religious societies, meditation covers a wide range of mental prayer, strict introspective meditation, and higher types of contemplation. Prayer of the spirit is often identified with meditation. Mental prayer, as different from vocal prayer, is often con-

sidered to be meditation. The first stage of meditation, viz., just the bare knowledge of things of the sense-world, can hardly be called meditation in any sense. It is just sense-perception and nothing more. But to make use of a sensible image, statues, a religious painting as aids to meditation is very commonly accepted as part of the Christian technique of meditation. What is generally called "the composition of place", as a prelude to introspective meditation, such as imagining any impressive scenery like a mountain, river, full moon, star-lit heavens, flowers, children, imagining Christ amidst the Jews teaching them and healing them, the statue of Moses or Christ by Michael Angelo, etc. are aids to meditation, but not meditation itself, strictly speaking. In some Christian countries there is lack of an enlightened religion due to widespread ignorance and superstition among the masses, as in the rural districts of Portugal, Italy, Ireland and in the mission lands. The people seem to be satisfied with popular devotions to saints, patrons, statues and images, hardly ever rising above the first two degrees of religious meditation about which St Thomas speaks in the above-quoted passage.

The Catholics number, according to the census of 1953, 473 million which will be about 18% of the world's total population. Protestants are 214.5 million, about 8% of world population. Orthodox Christians of Greek and Slavonic Churches are about 134 million, i.e. about 5%. The remaining 1,821 million, i.e. about 69% of world population belong to the non-Christian world. Excluding Islam and Judaism, roughly about 50% of the world forms the Hindu-Buddhist world of the Asian continent. It is to this Hindu-Buddhist world that we look to find gnosticism and meditative contemplation as the centre and essence of religion. Next, from the point of contemplative prayer and medi-

tation, comes Christianity, of which the most historical and all-comprehensive form is Roman Catholicism. In Catholic monasteries meditation is one of the main channels for the knowledge of God, self-purification and for climbing up the Mount of Sion. Outside monasteries, the Catholic Church organises monthly and yearly retreats and meditations for the benefit of the lay people. Then there is the preaching of missions, usually conducted by monks and priests, which serves as a kind of annual spring cleaning of souls, a kind of monsoon season for thoughtful Christians to receive torrential rains of grace and light from God.

In the Anglican monasteries and nunneries, meditation is one of the main features of their daily routine life. In India, some Anglican nuns and monks, retire to mountain tops and silent hill stations for their annual retreats and meditation. The Quakers, "the Friends", as they are better known in England, although they belong to the extreme left in Protestantism, have their silent prayers and meditation done in community. I have joined their silent prayer meetings in Dryton House, London, the headquarters of the Society, in Calcutta and elsewhere, and I have derived much fruit from that silent communion of souls with God and with the fellow-seekers.

In all religious institutions, monasteries, nunneries, seminaries, confraternities and convents, daily meditation is a community act at which all must be present. Usually, the prior, the superior or a preacher gives out the points to be meditated upon. Usually for one hour meditation, the giving out of points, in the form of a short talk with preludes, specific points for meditation in detail and the practical resolutions to be drawn from such meditation, lasts about twenty to thirty minutes. The remaining forty or thirty minutes are to be

spent in silent pondering over the points given, or read out, to the community. It is here the individual exertion comes in, and this is the most salutary and practical aspect of meditation.

The subjects of meditation may be anything directly helpful for the knowledge and love of God and our own personal sanctification. Meditation on the four last ends of man, viz., death, judgement, heaven and hell; on the purpose of human existence, viz. to know and love God and realise Him in this and reach Him in the next life; meditations on various virtues and sins with their causes and effects on the life of man, various episodes connected with the life and teachings of Jesus Christ, central teachings of the Church and missionary ideals of winning more souls to God and His Kingdom, etc., etc. are among the most common subjects for meditation in Christian monasteries, seminaries and convents.

Of the various systematic types of meditation, the well-known and a very popular form in all Catholic monasteries and institutions is the Ignatian method of meditation, based on the "*Spiritual Exercises*" written by St Ignatius of Loyola (1491-1556 A.D.). The Ignatian system of meditation was propagated by the Jesuits through closed retreats for the clergy, monks and nuns, friars and sisters and the lay people in every walk of life. Wherever the Jesuits went, they took with them *Spiritual Exercises* of their Father and Founder. The Jesuits made meditation and spiritual retreat as one of the main aims and objectives of their Society. As the Dominicans adhere to the *Summa Theologiae* of St Thomas Aquinas, as the Redemptorists to the writings of St Alphonsus of Liguori, so the Jesuits take their stand on the *Spiritual Exercises* of St Ignatius which, as a system of meditation, is perhaps one of the most thorough

and systematic form of meditational practice within the Catholic Church.

The laity may traverse the entire panorama of the *Spiritual Exercises* of Ignatius in three days of silent retreat with twelve meditations; the clergy and the monks and nuns may traverse the same course in their annual retreat for about one full week. But the Jesuits themselves undergo the full course of meditations in one month of silent retreat, which a good Jesuit undergoes twice in his life. The well-known Ignatian meditations begin with these words:

"Man was created to praise, revere and serve God our Lord, and there by to save his soul. And the other things on the face of the earth were created for man's sake, and to help him in the following out of the end for which he was created. Hence it follows that man should make use of creatures, as far as they help him towards this end, and should withdraw from them so far as they are a hindrance to him in regard to that end. Wherefore it is necessary to make ourselves detached in regard to all created things—in all that is left to the liberty of our free will, and is not forbidden it—so that we, on our part, should not wish for health rather than sickness, for riches rather than poverty, for honour rather than ignominy, for a long life rather than a short life, etc., in all matters; solely desiring and choosing those things which may better lead us to the end for which we were created."

These opening words of the *Spiritual Exercises* of St Ignatius is known as the Foundation of all spiritual life. The fullest meaning and implications of this Foundation is explained by experienced spiritual guides in some twenty or more meditations. No doubt, the Ignatian method of meditation, examination of conscience, spiritual reading and other *spiritual exercises*, usually practiced during closed silent retreats, have helped many to find their way back to holiness and integration from a life of vanity, futility and frustration. Behind the book one can sense the personality of a steel-willed Spanish soldier, converted from the vanities of the Spanish

Court, becoming one of the stalwart soldiers of Christ and His Church, a great saint and a hero at a time when Christianity was rent into two warring camps of Catholicism and Protestantism. It is the *Spiritual Exercises* that makes a Jesuit what he is, an unquestioning loyal soldier of Christ and the Catholic Church. ✓

But in the more ancient religious orders and monasteries, the system of meditation is more fluid, creative and receptive to any new light that may come from any side. There is something called the Benedictine technique, the Dominican technique, the Franciscan technique, etc., of meditation, according to the distinctive features of these various monastic orders. Now the Jesuit method is not quite palatable to us the Dominicans, because our traditions are fluid, creative and receptive, not as rigid and soldierly like the Jesuits. And yet, the essentials of meditation, viz. rational inquiry into God, soul and spiritual life and the supernatural life of divine grace and beatific vision are all the same everywhere in the Church. As Augustine had said: "There should be unity in essentials, freedom in non-essentials, but in everything there should be charity".

In convents for nuns, there is more scope for devotional practices, since womenfolk generally, and the religious womenfolk in particular, are better motivated by emotions and instincts than by logic, discursive thought or rational investigation. Man is by nature thought, brains and reason; while woman, by her very biological and psychic make-up, is more emotion, heart and sentiment. That is the reason why such popular devotions like "the devotion to the Sacred Heart", "to the Sacred Wounds of Jesus", "Our Lady of Fatima", "Our Lady of Seven Dolours", "Our Lady of the Mount", and a hundred other devotions to "Our Lady" of so and so, etc. form better subjects of meditation

for them than any serious inquiry into the Nature of God, mind of man, his spirit, and the higher forms of philosophic and theological meditations. Only a few giants among Christian nuns, saints like Catherine of Siena, Theresa of Avila and their likes reached the heights of philosophic, psychological and mystical contemplation. Woman represents Mother Earth; and only heroic souls like Catherine of Siena, Joan of Arc, Francis Cabrini and their likes transcended the limitations of their sex, and became pure souls in direct communion with God, and not resting in the arms of intermediaries and salvation agencies.

The general posture adopted for meditation in Christian religious orders is kneeling on a wooden plank with hands resting on a raised bench or kneeler or support of the choir. Only physically weak or sick or aged persons are allowed to sit during meditation. In the beginning, to kneel down for half an hour or one full hour for meditation is somewhat trying; but soon an enthusiastic and generous soul gets used to it; he forms a habit of it, and even an hour or more of meditation in kneeling posture is not even noticed by him. Hardly after two years of my monastic life in the Dominican Order a hard thick skin tissue grew on both my knees as a result of kneeling for about four to five hours a day, one hour meditation, half an hour rosary, half an hour examination of conscience, half an hour scriptural readings, and about two hours or more of private devotions practiced in kneeling posture in my monastic cell. For, in the religious orders, besides the community life, each individual is left free to make the best use of the time in either study, or prayer, or work, meditation or any other practice which one thinks fit for his mental and spiritual unfoldment.

The Dominican Order has the most liberal,

intellectual and philosophical traditions than many of the religious organisations of the Catholic Church. I recall with pleasure even today those years when for my private meditation I had the most metaphysical topics like *De Ente et Essentia*—Being and Essence—of St Thomas Aquinas, *De Consolatione Philosophiae*—Consolation of Philosophy—by Boetius, *Phaedo* of Plato, *Apologia*, *Crito* and other works of Plato, the works of Dionysius the Areopagite and, of course, the *Summa Theologiae* of St Thomas Aquinas which, to a Dominican, is the second Bible of his spiritual and cultural heritage. These were not merely studied but meditated upon, question by question, article by article. It is those strong habits I formed in my Order, to study, meditate, write and preach that are still alive and active in me to such an extent that even today I feel something gone wrong when I miss my daily meditation, my studies, my reading and writing. Nay, I feel giddy, headache and a general malaise when I neglect my daily silent meditation, my spiritual reading, my studies, however pressing may be the other duties connected with my missionary and propagandistic apostolate and my humanitarian and humanistic interests today. How powerful are the habits we form in our plastic teens and early twenties, and how lasting are their urges and effects in our lives! Even good habits, once formed out of sheer enthusiasm and a kind of indefinite idealism, become all the more strengthened in later life when, after gaining that biological and spiritual maturity, the experiences of life throw much more light on our immature life. What were once formed as unconscious acts and habits become now bright-lit, fully conscious, leading us to the shores of the super-conscious, the supernatural shores of God.

Another source of meditation in Christian mona-

teries is found in the community practice of choral singing and choral recitation of the Divine Office. Although, for eight years, I gave up the practice of the daily recitation of the whole office of the day, at an immature stage of my wanderings, now I am fully convinced that the daily recitation of the Breviary, canonically termed "the Divine Office" is one of the best forms of Christian meditation, when the one who recites the Breviary applies his mind and heart to what he recites or sings. For those who are fit for abstract meditation on divine truths and subtler metaphysical and mystical aspects of divine and spiritual life, the Breviary, or good spiritual readings from Plato, Avicenna, Al Gazali, Catherine of Siena, Meister Eckhart, St Augustine, Origen and other great luminaries of the East and the West can supply food for meditation. For monks and nuns with originality, creativity and daring, meditation means abstraction from the entire sense-bound world and plunging into the shoreless sea of the world of the Spirit, stopping at nothing short of Godhead Supreme, and understanding man, soul and world as illumined by God-light from up above. The highest, or the sixth stage of meditative contemplation about which Aquinas speaks, is the ecstatic vision of God which is gained only through supernatural powers of divine grace granted to some rare privileged souls, even while treading their journey on earth, eminent mystics like St Paul, Francis of Assisi, Albert the Great, St Bonaventure and their likes. When Aquinas received that supernal light of seeing God face to face, as it were, he told his friend Reginald that all his *Summa Theologiae* and all his other writings paled into insignificance like mere heaps of straw, compared to the vision he had, a vision which could be individually experienced, but never adequately expressed by pen or tongue.

Often in our lives, even the beauties of Nature, a glorious sunset, the green meadows and lawns, the chirping birds and innocent children and even the most ordinary street scenes induce in us that silent sleep to the sense-bound world and awakening to the realities of the Spirit-world, to God's Kingdom. Sometimes the rainbow, at other times the monsoon downpour, now a funeral march, at other times the pathos and pangs of human love and friendship, etc., etc. become for us books of meditation, giving us glimpses into the Real, to God and divine truths. Among all the Nature-poets, perhaps Wordsworth expresses this type of meditation and ecstasy most vividly when he sang:

"Another gift
Of aspect more sublime; that blessed mood,
In which the burden of the mystery,
In which the heavy and weary weight
Of all this unintelligible world
Is lightened: that serene and blessed mood,
In which the affections gently lead us on,
Until, the breath of this corporeal frame,
And even the motions of our human blood
Almost suspended, we are laid asleep
In body, and become a living soul:
While within an eye made quiet by the power
Of harmony, and the deep power of joy,
We see into the life of things." —*Lines on Tintern Abbey*

This seeing "into the life of things" is the main objective of meditation which is at once an investigation into the heart of things and the beatific repose in truths or Truth seen or glimpsed at. The secret of interior life in monasteries is meditation or mental prayer. The key that opens the *sancta sanctorum* of God and soul is meditation. The very goal of human pilgrimage is to reach the summits of meditation of the Divine Essence, variously called as beatific vision, the blissful contemplation of God, ecstatic love of God, etc.

The worldlings hinge on *carpe diem*—eat, drink,

make merry, for tomorrow we die—philosophy of life. They sing with Omar Khayyam:

“Here with a Loaf of Bread beneath the Bough,
A Flask of Wine, a Book of Verse—and Thou
Beside me singing in the Wilderness,
And Wilderness is Paradise now...
Ah, make the most of what we yet may spend,
Before we too into the Dust descend;
Dust unto dust, and under Dust to lie,
Sans Wine, Sans song, Sans Singer, and Sans End!”

To mystics, contemplatives and the meditative and Self-reflecting introverts, the flask of wine and the singer is not what turns to dust, but what lies beyond dust and dusk of life. The song of a *sanyasin*, or a monk, is much more romantic without any poignancy, as a monk's wine and love and lover spring from the Immortal, from Reality.

Personally, I believe, Omar Khayyam in his *Rubaiyat*, used the symbols of sex and wine to designate the Divine, as was wont among the Sufi mystics like Jalladudin Rumi, Hafiz, Manzur, Rabia of Hazra and their likes. The symbolism of human love is adopted also by Christian mystics to describe the ineffable love of God. *The Song of Songs* in the Old Testament is the classical example of using human love based on sex and wine to portray the union of God to a soul enamoured of Supreme Beauty of the Absolute. St John of the Cross, Catherine of Siena, Theresa of Avila and a number of Christian mystics nurtured within the seclusion of a cloister, have sung similar songs and ecstatic lyrics of Love Divine clothed in human phraseology.

In monasteries there is a gradual ascent in the practice of meditation. For novices and beginners there is the meditation based on images, recitation of rosaries and vocal prayers and good reading. But as they grow in spiritual maturity, the technique of meditation becomes more and more abs-

tract, farther and farther removed from sense-images and even rational inquiry. It becomes more and more intuitive of the divine truths, more and more contemplative, seeing even the fleeting flux of things and events *sub specie aeternitatis*. Then words become worlds; then God is no more a distant entity to be discussed or speculated about; but the Life of our lives, the Soul of our souls, God who is so intimate and vital to us, nearer than our hands and feet, closer than our breathing and heart-beats.

Higher forms of meditation, and the supreme ecstasy and joy derived therefrom, are all practiced by monks in silence and solitude of their cells or hermitages, not always in the common practices in choir or lecture hall. These higher forms of meditative bliss and contemplative ecstasy are experienced not only while kneeling down, but more often while walking, sitting, writing, even while dining. In other words, there is hardly any more exclusive posture or channel through which one hears the music of the Divine. The meditatives and contemplatives are constantly transported to the regions of celestial bliss and ever-growing, ever-deepening and ever-widening vision of the Divine. Now, the gravitational orbit of the soul to God is reached, and the meditative soul will be the partaker of God's own Nature and His Bliss through His grace.

The higher form of meditation centering around God and God alone, the Absolute, the One without a second, is strictly speaking contemplation. The ascending ladder of our mind to reach the Creator from the Creation is meditation; but once the pinnacle of the meditative Everest is reached, dawns there contemplation, which primarily consists in intuiting the Divine Essence, and seeing the whole non-God world in

the Light of God. The ascending process of meditation is implied in the words of St Paul:

"For that which is known of God is manifest in them. For God has manifested it unto them. For the invisible things of Him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made; His eternal power and His divinity so that they are inexcusable."

—*Rom.* i. 19, 20

"I was meditating on Thy works, O Lord, and I will meditate on all the admirable things of Your hands. I stretched forth my hands to Thee: my soul languishes without Thee as earth without water." —*Psalms.* I, 42. 5 & 6

On the descending scale of contemplative meditation one sees the world below illumined by the light of God. Dionysius the Acropagite, Plotinus, Augustine and others are examples of this contemplative meditation, descending as it were to the created things. Of all the scriptural books, the deuterocanonical book of *Wisdom* is full of ideas emanating from the summits of contemplative meditation. It says:

"She (Divine wisdom realised in contemplative meditation) reacheth therefore from end to end mightily and ordereth all things sweetly. Her have I loved, and have sought her out from my youth, and have desired to take her for spouse, and I became a lover of her beauty. She glorieth her nobility by being conversant with God; yea, the Lord of all things hath loved her. For it is she that teacheth the knowledge of God and is the chooser of His works."

—*Wisdom*, VIII, 1-4

"O how good and sweet is thy spirit, O Lord, in all things! And therefore Thou chastisest them that err by little and little: and admonisheth them, and speaketh to them concerning the things wherein they offend: that leaving their wickedness, they may believe in Thee, O Lord...All men are vain in whom there is not the knowledge of God: and who, by these good things that are seen could not understand Him who is. Neither by attending to the works, have acknowledged who was the workman...With whose beauty, if they being delighted took them to be gods; let

them know how much the Lord of them is more beautiful than they. For the first author of beauty made all these things..." — *Wisdom*, XII, 1, 2 & XIII, 1, 3

These and similar superfine lyrics of theistic saints spring from the depths of meditation which flourishes as naturally in monasteries as roses and lilies in a cultivated garden. Theism, being more in tune with the I-and-Thou relationship of man, the dualistic nature of the universe has, perhaps, greater charm and attraction to a religious mind than monistic idealism of the *Advaita Vedantic* type. The Hindu Yoga has been made palatable to the religious-minded souls by its theistic dosages, diluting the traditional monistic rigidity of the ancient Indo-Aryan unitary traditions and scriptures with a personal God of frimfarian theology.

In the Christian ideal of contemplative meditation there is a stage in which the religious soul dwells almost habitually in a meditative mood and in a state of contemplative rapture. Aquinas attributes this continuous and habitual state of meditation, however imperfect it may be in our earthly pilgrimage with the load of body around our souls, to the fact that contemplation "pertains to the incorruptible side of our souls". (II-IIae. CLXXX. 8)

It is, however, to be admitted that higher phases of meditation, terminating in contemplative bliss of the Eternal, are reached by so very few even in monastic and religious institutions, partly because of the lack of spiritual guides who have had vital and personal experiences in the field, and partly because of the clogging of mind and heart through cheaper types of devotions and popular practices which, while helping to keep the popular faith alive and active, clip the wings of the soul to soar higher and higher into the heart of Reality, into the very life of God.

It is my conviction that most organised forms of monasticism in the West fall short in developing freer and unfettered techniques of meditation and contemplation which the Hindu-Buddhist world has developed even long before the advent of Christianity. Barring the Christian mystics and contemplatives, the types of meditation and contemplation in Christian monasteries does not go beyond the third or fourth stage which Aquinas describes. I believe there is much both the Hindu-Buddhist East and Christian West could profitably learn from each other, if there is a better understanding between them and a sort of exchange of monastic experiences in these two religious hemispheres of the world.

CHAPTER X

MEDITATION—BUDDHIST PSYCHOLOGY

"When this knowledge, this insight had arisen within me, my heart was set free from intoxication of becoming, set free from the intoxication of ignorance. In me, thus emancipated, there arose the certainty of that emancipation. And I came to know: 'Rebirth is at end. The higher life has been fulfilled. What had to be done has been accomplished. After this present life, there will be no beyond'. This last insight did I attain to in the last watch of the night. Ignorance was beaten down, insight arose, darkness was destroyed, the light came, inasmuch as I was there strenuous, aglow, master of my self."

—*Buddha—Maha Saccaka Sutta*

"Earnestness is the path to immortality, thoughtlessness is the path to death. Those who are in earnest do not die, those who are thoughtless are as if dead already."

—*Dhammapada II, 1*

"Enlightenment is the highest quality of the mind. As it is free from all limiting attributes of subjectivity, it is like unto space, penetrating everywhere, as the unity of all. That is to say, it is the universal *Dharmakaya* of all *Tatagathas*. The multitude of people are said to be lacking in enlightenment, because ignorance prevails there from all eternity, because there is a constant succession of confused subjective states from which they have never been emancipated."

—*Asvaghosa—Awakening of Faith*

It was in the year 1943, when I was in London, I was given a copy of *Dhammapada* by a Burmese Buddhist monk then living in London, Bhikhu U. Tittila. That was the first time I read the *Dhammapada*, given by a representative mouthpiece of Theravada Buddhism. The Bhikhu told me that the *Dhammapada* is the New Testament of the

Buddhists, the most studied and helpful manual for monks in all Buddhist monasteries, the quintessence of Buddha's teachings, and the best manual of meditation on the Buddhist fundamentals. It was Dhammapada, its psychological depths, that attracted me to study other sources of Buddhist religion and philosophy.

Buddhism is essentially a religion of meditation, *dhyana*. The images and statues of Buddha, an overwhelming majority of them, as preserved to us in Buddhist art and culture, are all in meditating posture. Buddha became Buddha in the last vigil of meditations under the pipal tree in Gaya. Just at the spot where the same traditional bo-tree is still alive, Emperor Asoka built a pyramidal temple which, renewed and re-built from time to time, stands high on the same spot where the Sakya Muni became the Enlightened one, the Buddha of history to this day. There, outside the temple, inside and all around the rectangular square there are hundreds of statues of Buddha in meditation posture. That posture is known as *dhyani-Buddha*. Inside the Bodhi Gaya Temple there is a large painting of Buddha, seated in *padmasana* posture, absorbed in meditation and yet with gently smiling face, with the message of mercy and love, enlightenment and wisdom writ largely on his face. The entire Buddhist world is just a distant wave of that enlightenment which Buddha received while absorbed in meditation in Gaya. All the practices of meditation in Buddhist monasteries are but faint echoes of that meditation which made Prince Siddharta emerge out as the Buddha of this age.

As in Christianity, in Buddhism also there are many stages in the theory and practice of meditation. The lowest grade centres around image worship, drum-beating, rosary-reciting and the gorgeous religious rites and colourful ceremonies of the Lamaist

monasteries of Tibet. In most Buddhist monasteries and Buddhist shrines there will be a statue of Buddha in the middle to whom worship is offered with prayers, flowers and incense. The lay people seem to need this devotional and emotional aspect of religion, although Buddhism, as it emerged pure from the heart of Buddha, arose as a protest against ritualistic, ceremonial and priestly religion. It is the irony of history that religious prophets, who inveighed against priestcraft and priesthood in all forms, should themselves later be raised to the status of high priests and supreme pontiffs by the mass psychology of a devotional people, who can hardly get along without these outer rinds and empty shells of religion. Popular Buddhism, specially in the Mahayana countries, ends up in pilgrimages, rosaries, devotions, image-worship and ritualistic practices without trying to soar higher into the meditative esoteric of that great faith.

At Sarnath, where Buddha delivered his famous first sermon— I happened to meet three Tibetan monks who were seen in the evenings going round and round the stupas, reciting their rosaries. They were repeating hundreds of times the well-known Buddhist *mantra*: *Om mani Padme Om*. They were self-possessed and introspective. After their rosary, which they recited while circumambulating around the stupa, I asked them why they did not spend more time in meditation, introspective brooding over the great Noble Truths and the *Aryan Path*. One of them, answered me in broken Hindi:

“Meditation is for *Buddhas* and *bhodisatwas*, *Arhats* and *Theras* (elders), not for us *sramaneras*, novices. We should approach Buddha through our rosaries and drum-beating and prayer-flags.”

And yet, on inquiry, I discovered that the monk who answered me was a full-fledged ordained Lama. It might have been his humility that made him

think that he was still a novice, when he was then past sixty years of age. The esoteric of Buddhism teaches that Buddha is not any historical person, but the potential Enlightenment awaiting to be actualised through the Eightfold Path, of which *Samma Sati* or self-recollection and *Samma Samadhi* or the right type of contemplative meditation are the crowning and culminating peaks of Buddhist ethics, religion and philosophy.

Here in Bombay, in the Worli Buddhist temple, I met a Japanese monk, who belonged to a sect which believed that by beating a drum in the temple, by reciting the rosary, through image-worship and other popular forms of Buddhist worship, one could attain salvation and enlightenment. The outstanding Indian Buddhist scholar, author and editor of *Tripitakas*, Bhikhu Jagadish Kasyap, and also an old friend of mine for the last three decades, happened to stay in the same *vihara* for a few days. He told me that the Japanese monk who was in charge of that particular temple was more of a priestly type than an introspective monk. Hence the drums, incense, image-worship, etc. at the expense of the inner core of Buddhist samadhi and meditation.

Now these and similar facts point out to one truth, that mankind seeks after Truth at various levels, and that it is left to the individual to seek and find one's own way that will best help his self-realisation at a given stage of his self-unfoldment.

In Buddhist monasteries the practice of meditation has a twofold objective; the first is to extricate our hearts from worldly vanities and cosmic illusions. This corresponds to what the Christian theologians call "the purgative way" which consists in cleansing our souls from sins and vicious habits and prurient tendencies. In Christian monasteries

there used to be the practice of meditating upon a human skull kept in a monk's room so that the grinning skull may remind him of death as the end of everything, and prevent him from sinning. The Buddhist monks also are taught to meditate on a dead body, its putrefaction and the bare skull and skeleton left behind. These meditations on the filth and foul aspects of the human body are described in detail in Buddhist scriptures with a view to instilling a sense of loathsomeness of body in the minds of Buddhist monks.

But meditations on the body is only the beginning or the negative way, the purgative way for a monk to ascend higher in the path of meditation. There is a big gulf—though not unbridgeable—between popular forms of Buddhism in its devotional and ceremonial forms, and Buddhism purely and exclusively as a system of meditation, *dhyana*. One of the main Japanese branches of Mahayana Buddhism which has stuck to this pure meditation form of Buddhism is the Zen school. Here all props are left behind, and man is asked to face Reality face to face, inwardly, intuitively and independently.

Bhodidharma, one of the outstanding masters of Zen in the Japanese and Chinese traditional art and sculpture, is painted with his eyes wholly and fully turned inwards. When Bhodidharma preached his Buddhism of inwardliness and introspective meditation, with no reliance on priesthood, rituals, ceremonies and even the authority of the *Tripitakas* and Scriptures prophets and gods, people laughed at him. That, was about the year 526 A.D. But this South Indian missionary of Zen Buddhism held his ground undaunted, lit bright the esoteric core of meditational Buddhism in its most unsullied, undiluted and uncompromising

form. In China, Bhodidharma is even considered as the twenty-eighth successor to Buddha in restoring religion to its original purity through insistence on the meditational and introspective aspects of the Buddhist philosophy of life.

Buddhism, more than any other historical religion, insists on seeking emancipation through self-knowledge, self-control and self-purification. "Within yourself deliverance must be sought, each man his prison makes", said Buddha. Now, meditation is the core and kernel for a Buddhist monk to arrive at the self-knowledge, the understanding of the "three signs of beings", viz. *Anicca* or impermanency, *Anatta* or unsubstantiality, or impersonality and *Dukha* or suffering, and, liberating oneself from the tentacles of the transient flux of the phenomenal world, enter the sanctuary of the Real, the *Nēūmenon*, the Permanent, the Uncreated and the Unconditioned.

While the lower trends in monastic life lead many monks to take refuge in faith in Buddha, in rites and ceremonies, there are stronger monastic orders, specially the Zen branch of the Mahayana, which insist on the doctrine of the Mind only, on Supreme Enlightenment or *Prajna* and on meditation. The very word Zen is the Japanese version of the Chinese word *Ch'an*, which, again, is the corrupted form of the original Indian word *Dhyan*—which means meditation which leads to contemplation of the Divine in *Samadhi*. It was this concentrated meditation, introspective vision of the Self which Bhodidharma insisted upon when he said:

"A special transmission from outside the scriptures;
With no dependence upon words and letters;
Direct pointing to the soul of man;
Intuiting into one's own nature deep."

Christian mystics who thrived in monasteries,

in their introspective moments, also sang the same song of inner inwardliness. St Augustine said in his soliloquies: *Noli exire foras; ad teipsum redi: In interiore hominis habitat veritas*—"Go not outside yourself, enter within, into your own self, for truth abides within the heart of man". The Christian esoterie also says with Jesus: "The Kingdom of God is within you".

The Self, the Real, is not the ego or the I-consciousness in man. That ego is as ephemeral as a bubble that comes up for a while in a brook or river and then it is blown out. That ego is the result of a series of bodily and mental combinations, confections or skandhas, as the Buddhists would say. But the vision of the real Self—the "I am who am" of the Mosaic revelation—is the source of blissful Nirvana for a Buddhist, for a Christian or a Hindu, because in that Self-plane there is no name, communal walls or religious barriers left. All prison walls are broken. All dual opposites are transcended in Self, the Universal, the Absolute. As the Upanishads say:

"Self is below, above, behind, before, right and left. Self is all, all-in-all. He who sees, perceives and understands this, loves the Self, delights in the Self, revels in the Self, rejoices in the Self—he becomes a *Swaraj*, self-ruler; he is the lord and master of all the worlds. But those who think in a different way than this, live in perishable worlds, and have other beings as their rulers."

—*Chandogya Upanishad*, VII, 23

Those Buddhist monks, who were at the same time the philosophical interpreters of the Buddhist ways of life, thinkers like Nagarjuna, Nagasena, Buddhaghosa and Asvaghosa, have all their systems built around that Self which is beyond and behind all selves, which is beyond something and nothing, which is emptiness, *Sunya*, but not the negative emptiness, but positive Plenum-Void. From the

Self point of view, Buddhism is the most scientific religion in the world. Contrasted to this, from non-self matter modern scientists build up their own systems in the physical world. As matter and spirit are not mutually exclusive but integrative of each other, it follows that the Self-psychology of the Buddhists is integrative of the monistic materialism of the empirical scientists, from Heraclitus to Haeckel. The only difference is that in Buddhist meditation, the physical world of phenomena are explained from the vision of the *Nāgmenon*, the Plenum-Void, while the materialists go the other way round; from matter to mind, from mind to self, without however going beyond the phenomenal self. Here is what the late Joseph McCabe, my old ex-Franciscan friend, wrote:

"An illimitable Substance revealing itself to us as matter and force (or spirit), is dimly perceived at the root of this evolution as a simple and homogenous medium (prothyl), associated with an equally homogenous force. Then the continuous prothyl, by a process not yet determined, forms in what are virtually or really discrete and separate particles—electrones: the électrones unite to build atoms of various sizes and structures, and the rich variety of chemical elements is given, the base of an incalculable number of combinations and forms of matter. Meantime, the more concentrated (ponderable) elements gather into cosmic masses under the influence of the force associated with them; the force evolving and differentiating equal pace with the matter (with which it is one in reality). Nebulae are formed, solar systems grow like crystals from them; planets take on solid crusts, with enveloping oceans and atmospheres. Presently, a more elaborate combination of material elements, protoplasm with—naturally—a more elaborate force side, makes its appearance, and organic evolution sets in. The little cellules cling together and form tissue-animals, which increase in complexity and organisation and centralisation until the human frame is produced, the life-force growing more elaborate with the structure, until it issues in the remarkable properties of the human mind."

—Joseph McCabe—Haeckel's Critics Answered. Pp. 68-69

While the physical scientists take their stand on ponderable matter and explain away the imponderable values of human spirit, the Buddhists take their stand on the undeniable facts of life, from impermanency, transiency, unsubstantiality and misery of everything and, from these facts, they climb higher and higher until they reach, mind, spirit and the Ineffable Void, Plenum-Void. In physics man is made to ascend up to the throne of God, man sitting in the place of God as though he were God, which he is not; while in religion, God descends to the level of man, incarnating as it were in human form. As modern atomic scientists and nuclear physicists explain matter, man and mind, so the Buddhists, from the unshaken rock of self-awareness, self-possession and self-luminous consciousness, explain Space and Time, impermanency and the Permanent. Physicists observe the phenomena and enunciate the laws of Nature with no reference to the moral and ethical improvement of man; while Buddhists study the outside phenomena only with reference to their own self-improvement. This ethical utilitarianism and spiritual pragmatism, far from deflecting us from Self-unfoldment, is an aid to that; because Nature, deeper down, is the reflection of the Ultimate, and it cannot but point out to us the path towards Self-realisation. Hence the Thomistic dictum: "Grace builds on Nature and perfects it". Buddha said:

"Such and such is upright conduct; such and such is earnest contemplation; such and such is intelligence. Great becomes the fruit, great the advantage of earnest contemplation, when it is set round with earnest contemplation. The mind set round with intelligence is set quite free from the Intoxications, that is to say, from the Intoxication of Sensuality, from the Intoxication of Becoming, from the Intoxication of Delusion, from the Intoxication of Ignorance."

The *Mahāparinirvāṇa Tantra* or the *Mahā Parinibbāna Suttanta* as in Pali, from which the above quotation is taken, is one of the well-known classics on Buddhist meditation, its psychology and its fruits. Here also one reads of the graded degrees of meditation, rising ever higher from the sense-bound phenomena to mental, spiritual and supra-conscious levels. It tells us:

"The Exalted One entered into the first stage of Rapture. And rising out of the first stage he passed into the second. And rising from the second he passed into the third... And rising out of the fourth stage of Rapture, he entered into the state of mind to which the infinity of space is alone present. And passing out of the mere consciousness of the infinity of space he entered into the state of mind to which the infinity of thought is alone present. And passing out of the mere consciousness of the infinity of thought he entered into a state of mind to which nothing at all was specially present...etc."

—*Mahāparinibbāna Suttanta*, Dig. II, 156, 8

Meditation, as psychology, is the specialised field of Buddhism. No religion has ever fathomed the depths of consciousness of human psyche as Buddhism. While popular Buddhism revels in devotions, rosaries, pilgrimages, ringing of bells and sounding of gongs and drums and hoisting prayer flags up in the skies, the core of esoteric Buddhism, to this day, clings to the analysis of self and the most creative and bravest psycho-synthesis ever attempted at by human mind. The Socratic Gnothi Seuton—Know Thyself was not first announced in Greece. Centuries earlier the Buddhist monks, following in the footprints of the Buddha, proclaimed aloud: "Know thy self as a mirage, sink deeper still, and reach Nirvana". Much earlier than even Buddha and Buddhism the bards of the Upanishads sang the same hymn of self-knowledge through meditation. The Upanishadic *Atmanam Viddhi—Know thy soul—is more*

thoroughgoing than even the Socratic *Gnothi Seuton*, because the Upanishadic self is the bridge between the individualised self of man and the Universal Self of the Cosmos, the vital link between *jivalma* and the *paramatma*, the embodied soul and Universal Self, the Being of all beings, the Life of all lives, the One behind the many, the *Néūmenon* behind the phenomena. It is, therefore, in the field of philosophy and mysticism that meditation, in its various stages of perfection, finds its place in religion in general, and in Buddhism in particular.

The Buddhist technique of meditation has no other objective but to free man from the obvious miseries and limitations of life. This empirical philosophy, this utilitarian psychology, this redemptive ethics will never lend itself to merely speculative problems such as the origin of the world, creation, God as a personal being, and such other subjects which in popular theology and religion hold such a prominent place. Those Buddhist monks who follow the path of stricter discipline and the more stringent vehicle of salvation have meditation on the psychological fundamentals of religion as the supreme way to enlightenment. In a conversation with Malunkyaputta who said: "I will not lead the religious life under the Blessed One until the Blessed One shall explain to me either that the world is eternal or that the world is not eternal... that the saint either exists or does not exist after death", the Buddha said:

"It is as if, Malunkyaputta, a man had been wounded by an arrow thickly smeared with poison, and his friends and companions, his relatives, kinsfolk, were to procure for him a physician or surgeon; and the sick man were to say: 'I will not have this arrow taken out until I have learnt whether the man who wounded me belonged to the warrior caste or to the Brahmin... Whether he who wounded me was black, or dusky, or of yellow skin... or whether the man

who wounded me was from the village, town or city'... that man would die, without ever having learnt this.

"The religious life does not depend on the dogma that the world is eternal...or not eternal. Whether or not eternal there still remains birth, old age, death, sorrow, lamentation, grief, and despair, for the extinction of which in the present life I am prescribing... I have not explained that the world is finite...infinite, that the saints exist after death...or do not exist after death. And why, Malunkyaputta, I have not explained this? Because this profits not, nor has to do with the fundamentals of religion, nor tends to aversion, absence of passion, cessation, quiescence, the supernatural faculties, supreme wisdom and Nirvana.

"And what, Malunkyaputta, have I explained? Misery, have I explained, the origin of misery, the cessation of misery, and the path leading to the cessation of misery have I explained. And why, Malunkyaputta, have I explained this? Because this does profit, has to do with fundamentals of religion, and tends to aversion, absence of passion, cessation, quiescence, knowledge, supreme wisdom, Nirvana: therefore have I explained it. Accordingly, hear always in mind what it is that I have not explained and what it is that I have explained."

—*Majjhima Nikaya, Sutta, 63*

The Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path are, then, the centre and circumference of the Buddhist religion and, for monks, the main theme of their meditations. All other subjects are mere aids to the understanding of the Four Noble Truths and the realisation of the Eightfold Path. It is like putting the essence of Christianity in the crucifixion of the flesh and the resurrection of the Spirit within, which is the ethical and practical content of Christianity.

There is no wonder, then, that the Dhammapada, has become the most popular manual of meditation for monks in Buddhist monasteries. There is a sense of urgency, a returning to the basic fundamentals and the most universal facts of life, viz. misery, disease, old age, death and the way to be freed from their clutches by unfolding the latent spiritual

powers in man, in enlightened consciousness, in Buddhi, Maha Bhodi, wherein lies the seeds of immortality, perennial bliss and vitality, and something else which eludes all definitions and descriptions, a vital experience which points out to us the way to Nirvana.

Buddhism is the most ethical philosophy and psychological religion in the world which had, has, and will have a great contribution to make to the world market of cultures and civilisation. Its foremost contribution, its crest-jewel will be its insistence on free, unfettered meditational inquiry into the facts of life, and learning life-wisdom therefrom, without having to take recourse to outside agencies, gods and intermediaries. In Buddhist monasteries it is individual meditation that is encouraged more than community practices. The pathway to Buddhist perfection, "Arhathood", is meditation. Now, "the brother who is *arahant*, in whom intoxicants are destroyed...who is emancipated by true gnosis, he is incapable of perpetrating the following;

- (1) He is incapable of deliberately depriving a living creature of life.
- (2) He is incapable of taking what is not given so that it constitutes theft.
- (3) He is incapable of sexual impurity.
- (4) He is incapable of deliberately telling lies.
- (5) He is incapable of deliberately laying up treasure for indulgence in worldly pleasure as he used to do in the life of the house.
- (6) He is incapable of taking a wrong course through partiality.
- (7) He is incapable of taking a wrong course through hate.
- (8) He is incapable of taking a wrong course through stupidity.
- (9) He is incapable of taking a wrong course through fear.

These words, ascribed to Buddha, are the practical results that accrue to a monk who meditates and strives hard to reach the ideal of perfection. Meditation is the pointer and pathway to gnosis, that emancipates, that leads its votaries to the shores of Nirvana.

CHAPTER XI

MONASTIC VOWS—CHASTITY

"How are we to conduct ourselves, Lord, with regard to womankind?"

"As not seeing them, Ananda".

"But if we should see them, what are we to do?"

"No talking, Ananda".

"But if they should speak to us, Lord, what are we to do?"

"Keep wide awake, Ananda".

—*Mahāparinibbāna Suttanta*, D. II, 140, 9

"He that is without a wife is solicitous for the things that belong to the Lord; how he may please God. But he that is with a wife is solicitous for the things of the world; how he may please his wife. And he is divided. And the unmarried woman and the virgin thinketh on the things of the Lord; that she may be holy both in body and in spirit. But she that is married thinketh on the things of the world; how she may please her husband. And this I speak for your profit, not to cast a snare upon you, but for that which is decent and which may give you power to attend upon the Lord, without impediment."

—*I Cor.* VII, 32-35

"All power comes to a yogi through chaste continence."

—*Patanjali*, Yoga II. 38

Of all the monastic vows, there is none so universally accepted as central and essential in all monasteries of Christianity, Buddhism and Hinduism, as the vow of chastity, continence, celibacy, virginity. There are no two opinions with regard to the meaning and implications of the vow of chastity in monasteries. While the other two prominent monastic vows, viz., poverty and obedience admit degrees in their observance and various senses in which these two vows are understood or interpreted.

ted, the vow of chastity is understood literally in the entire world of monasticism, whether Eastern or Western, in Christianity or in the Hindu-Buddhist worlds.

There is an unbroken tradition in the monastic orders that their respective founders and the fountain-heads of monastic ideals were either life-long celibates, or that they were converts to chastity from a life of sensual dissipation. It is also the constant belief among monks and nuns of the Christian and the Hindu-Buddhist worlds that spiritual perfection is unattainable without the virtue of continence, doubly rendered strong by the religious vow of chastity. Besides the traditions and teachings in monastic orders, one finds that the mystics all the world over, and the esoteric wisdom everywhere held that the control of sexual impulse, the sublimation of sex, was essential for the unfolding of the deeper Self in man.

In ancient Greece there were the towering personalities like Pythagoras, Plato, Plotinus, the Stoics and the founders and members of a number of well-known esoteric cults, the Sufis of Persia and the Yogins of India, the mystics among the Shintoists, the Bushido and the Zen, all, with one accord, sang the hymn to the goddess Chastity, to *Sophia*, to *Saraswati* whom they wooed and loved through the vow of chastity.

Buddha, the greatest founder of the largest monastic order in the world, lived the life of a householder, enjoyed the pleasures of senses and sex to satiety, even *ad nauseam*. He led the opposite extreme of doing penance, abstinence and starvation until his flesh dried up and mere skin covered his skeleton-like body. Buddhist art has depicted the scenes of Buddha's fastings in colourful ways. It is after experiencing both the extremes that Bud-

dhia preached his gospel of the Middle Path. And yet, with regard to the vow of chastity, he stuck to the path of extreme, i.e., by becoming an embodiment of chastity with no more taint of even sexual imaginations and inklings. The one condition for his disciples to join the *sangha* was that they should thereby cease to be householders if they were, or that they should undertake thereby to keep the vow of life-long chastity, unless they decided to return "to the lower life of the householder".

Jesus Christ, in history, tradition and mystic intuition, was a life-long virgin. He had disciples from the fairer sex too; but even to his closest disciple, Mary Magdalene, he said: "Touch me not".

In the *Prasna Upanishad* we read of Bharadwaja, Sukhiesa and four other philosophers approaching the sage Pippalada and seeking initiation into the highest wisdom. The *rishi* Pippalada told them that initiation into higher wisdom could be given only after they had observed strict continence for at least a full year. The *Chandogya Upanishad* also speaks of Brahma initiating god Indra into higher mysteries about the Ultimate Reality after making him observe the vow of continence for one hundred and one years! In the Hindu scriptures, monasteries and philosophical systems, the vow of chastity is known as *Brahmacharya*, which etymologically means the path leading one to Brahma, the Ultimate Reality. Historically, from prehistoric times, long before the great Buddhist monasteries came into being, the music of *Brahmacharya* was heard in the *Rig Veda*, the Upanishads and other most ancient scriptures of Hinduism.

As one wanders through the plains and hills, dales and valleys of India, one hears of the ancient *rishis* (sages), *sadhus* (ascetics), *bhikkhus* (mendicant monks), *parivrajikas* (wandering teachers), *yogis* and

yoginis (women yogis), all wedded to the ideal of chastity for the emancipation of the spirit. This is the one great monastic vow common to all monastics from the time of the ancient Vedic sages, Essenes of Palestine, the Neo-Platonists of Egypt, Buddhists of Asia, Pythagoreans of Hellas down to Christian ascetics and monks and nuns, to the monks of the Ramakrishna Mission Order, the celibate Theosophists and Christian Scientists, the celibate Gandhis and Tolstoys in political fields.

The vow of chastity, in some form or other, at some time or other, has been part and parcel of all great idealists, enthusiasts, and of all those noble souls who dedicated their lives for the uplift and welfare of fallen mankind. They seemed to have had an intuitive understanding of the tremendous power, energy and vision which are the outcome of chastity, when observed out of conviction, as a physical expression of a psychological mental attitude. But, chastity, when enforced from outside, without its psychic adjustment and sublimation of sex, is the source of great misery, unhappiness, diseases and death for men and women inside and outside monasteries. Sex starvation produces neuroses and psychoses and diseases; but sublimation of sex is the key to health, happiness and unfoldment of the deeper Self.

The ideal, then, of chastity in monasticism is a positive one. In modern psychology this positive concept of the vow of chastity is known as sublimation. The vows are never accepted ends; they are means to an end, but indispensable means for spiritual unfolding. "Absolute continence is the key to Buddhahood," said Buddha. The monks of the Ramakrishna Mission hinge the vow of chastity on the teachings of their founder and master who was chaste.

Ramakrishna said to his followers:

"Continence increases infinitely the power of retentivity and remembrance. Try to gain absolute mastery over the sexual instinct. If one succeeds in doing this, a psychological change is produced in the body by the development of a nerve known by the name of *Medha* whose function it is to transmute lower energies into the higher. The knowledge of the Higher Self is gained after the formation of this *Medha* nerve."

Swami Vivekananda interpreted the positive ideal of the vow of chastity to his monks and disciples in these pregnant words:

"Continence means chastity in thought, word and deed at all times and under all conditions. The chaste brain has tremendous energy and gigantic will-power. Without chastity there cannot be any spiritual strength. Continence gives wonderful control over mankind. The spiritual guides of humanity have been perfectly continent, and this is what gives them power. Whosoever practises unbroken continence for a period of twelve years, will be the recipient of extraordinary powers. If you want to be great, preserve continence without a break. Absolute continence is essential to become a spiritual teacher. Continence is the foundation of the Vedic wisdom. Continent life is a life of crystal purity. By simple practice of strict continence all learning can be mastered in a very short time and one obtains unfailing memory of what one hears or known but once. It is owing to this want of continence that everything is on the brink of ruin in our century. Complete continence gives great intellectual and spiritual power. The very fact of unmarriedness is a spiritual asset."

The state of unmarriedness is the negative side of chastity. Its positive content is the transcanalisation of the powerful sexual instinct and energies into creative channels of wisdom, literature, fine arts and all-sided service of mankind. We are all too heavily loaded at the point of sex. This basic instinct cannot be destroyed. What we can do is to dam it, canalise it into creative channels. Pro-creation is merely a biological process in our animal life; but creation belongs to gods and supermen.✓

If there is any way for us to attain the state of supermen, it is through the perfect control over the tiger, ape and the pig in us and through the sublimation of the sex instinct into the channels of Self-realised dynamics.

Against the ancient and modern onslaughts opposing the monastic vow of chastity and the clerical vow of celibacy, we can state that monasticism stands on solid grounds when even today the monastic orders and the clergy take their firm stand on the vow of chastity. Certainly, "there are eunuchs who had made themselves eunuchs for the Kingdom of Heaven's sake", as Jesus said (Mat. XIX, 12). Mahatma Gandhi, after years of struggle managed to bring his sex life strictly *under control* through the vow of chastity which he took in his thirties; after he had lived a life of normal sexual indulgence in married life. Speaking about his own experience, Gandhiji said:

"If even after twenty years of sensual enjoyment I have been able to reach this state, how much better should I have been if I had kept myself pure during those twenty years as well? It is my full conviction that if only I had lived a life of unbroken *Brahmacharya* all through my life, my energy and enthusiasm would have been a thousand times greater. If an imperfect Brahmachari like myself can reap such benefits, how much more wonderful shall be the gain in power—physical, mental as well as moral—that unbroken *Brahmacharya* can bring us!"

Rabindranath Tagore, in spite of his great intellectual gifts and poetic genius, lived sex life freely, until in his forties, he decided to lead a chaste life. To Rabindranath the example of Swami Vivekananda was an added incentive to purity. The life wisdom that we learn from him came after he began to lead the life of a celibate sage. Then the poet became the spiritual guide, the *gurudev* of Indians; not before.

Immanuel Kant, Sir Isaac Newton, Michael

Angelo, P.C. Ray and a hundred other great names from the East and the West stand out to prove that it was their life of celibacy and purity that made them what they were. In other words, not only professional monks, but also great idealists, enthusiasts and creative geniuses voluntarily embraced a life of celibacy with a view to enhancing thereby their physical, moral and spiritual powers and utilising them for the best service of mankind. When a marriage proposal was made to Michael Angelo, he stoutly refused it and said: "Painting is a jealous mistress who suffers no rival". Once Beethoven was solicited for sexual indulgence by a young beautiful lady. In spite of his earlier habits of sensuality, Beethoven repulsed the sex appeal and exclaimed: "Let me keep it for a higher purpose—for God and creative art". Yes, reserving sexual powers and energies for creative purposes of God and Art and Service is called sublimation.

In the biochemical sphere, the vow of chastity means the retention of phosphorous, iron, calcium and other precious elements within the body. Sexual secretions are absorbed into the system through inguinal glands, strengthening the nervous, mental and spiritual powers of man. Dr Nichols says:

"It is a medical, a physiological fact that the best blood in the body goes to form the elements of reproduction in both the sexes. In a pure and orderly life this matter is absorbed and goes back into circulation ready to form the finest brain, nerve and muscular tissue. This matter carried back and diffused through this system makes him manly, strong, and brave and heroic. If wasted, it leaves him effeminate, weak, irresolute intellectually and physically debilitated and a prey to sexual irritation, irregular functions, morbid sensation, disordered muscular movement, a wretched nervous system, epilepsy, insanity and death."

I have come across literally hundreds of men and women, monks and nuns who, like the ancient Greek athletes, through their lives have borne out

the truth of the above statement. We ourselves whatever may be our profession or vocation in life can test the truth of chastity. It is a hard and strenuous battle to keep up the vow of chastity, especially when we are actively engaged in an apostolate of mercy and spiritual ministry. We have to pay its price; but, once the uphill climb is done, one reaches the green meadows and pasture-lands where one enjoys his pension, those delights and happiness which are a thousandfold more real, lasting and ecstatic than anything we could know or experience in the sensual and sexual life and worldly romance. "If sex is bliss, then Self is a thousand times more bliss," said Ramakrishna. A nun, who in the world was a flirt, testified this truth to me once. All the chaste souls converted from impurity can vouch for it.

Are there lapses in monasteries and among the clergy with regard to the observance of the vow of chastity? This is a question which many have asked me. Lapses there are, and, at times, grave lapses too among the clergy, monks and nuns. But these pitfalls were to be counted at the tip of the fingers. Lapses are not universal. Often the slip and falls are the result of inexperience, lack of interior life, routine, monotony and loneliness, lack of inward meditation and self-effort. There are many cases in which repeated lapses, after grave warnings from conscience, superiors and well-wishers can induce a monk, priest or nun to give up their vocation and return to the life of a householder, or indulge in various neurotic romances, after breaking away from the stern discipline of a monastic order, the church, or religious authority. After world war II, there are several thousands of priests, monks and nuns of the West who returned to the lower life of householders.

In the year 1943, September 8th, when I walk-

ed off from the Blackfriars Priory, St Giles Street, Oxford, I had then reached the culmination of the two views which I then wooed; viz., that the official Catholicism had forfeited the trust of Christ, and that for us Indians the Hindu-Buddhist religious philosophy was the best. It was as a result of a long-drawn-out inner crisis that I then found the monastic environment of my own Order alien to me. But now I realise there is hardly any intellectual crisis without its moral crisis deeper down. Scratch the brains and you will find that the heart has its own reasons which the brains never understand, nor will grasp.

A monk or a nun who, after having been caged and protected within the safe sequestered anchorage of a cloister for a decade or more, on leaving the cloister will find the world most exciting. The first monastic vow which he or she is likely to brush aside will be the vow of chastity. There is a world of literature and socio-cultural environment which teaches that sex is as innocent as food and drink, no more sinful to indulge in sex than in eating food or drinking. No less a person than Lenin held that sex-indulgence is no more a sin than drinking a glass of water. Then there are the glamorous cinemas and theatres which glorify sex; which, to an ex-monk, ex-priest or an ex-nun, means a new world of romantic dreams and imaginations. If a monk or a nun breaks away from the discipline of his monastic order, through his own fault or through the fault of the superiors, if he be still young in his twenties or thirties, he experiences a world of exciting romances. Many from the colony of ex-priests, ex-monks and ex-nuns I have known in Europe and Asia have lapsed into excesses in free love, romance and sexual aberrations. I do not consider myself to be an exception to this general rule I am now formulating based on my own experience and obser-

vation of similar cases. They fall on the rock of chastity, and they crash and crack. I have myself slipped and fallen, but not crashed and cracked in Europe and India. If I have been able to pull myself up from the dungeon, the hell and darkest night of the soul, I can only say that it was due to the sheer mercy of God, the Provident Father of all, and to the sweet memories of those innocent and enlightened years I spent as a monk, true to my vows, true to the observance of my rules and constitutions, strict in the observance of the vow of chastity. I am a sinner, and I will cry aloud, again and again: "Depart from me, Lord, for I am a sinner, no, depart not from me, for I am a sinner: The Sick need the physician."

"Lord, have mercy on me, a sinner". Our prayerful cry is never vain, as repentance washes the depths of our souls clean, snow-white.

In Christianity, an ordained priest or a professed monk, a religious friar or a nun, returning to the world and leading a householder's life is a matter of obloquy and shame. But in Buddhism any monk may return to the "lower life of a householder" at any time. I do know that the number of those who return to worldliness after experiencing the inner peace in monastic life and joy of meditation are few. But for those who find it difficult to observe the vows, especially chastity, there should be an open door through which they can come out without opprobrium, obloquy and public censure. As St Paul said: "It is better to marry than to burn." This is human logic. But higher still is the practical wisdom of the Church hardly ever granting dispensation to ordained ministers and solemnly professed religious members of either sex from their vows and allowing them to marry. I have known a number of priests and ordained religious monks who got married civilly since they

could not solemnise their matrimonial union in the Church, blessed by the Church. That ecclesiastical rigour has been the cause of alienation of some ordained priests and professed monks and nuns who were discredited, censured, humiliated and penalised and even excommunicated by some Church officials. Life flows far deeper than man-made laws. Again, the letter kills but the spirit vivifies. It is my firm conviction that the ecclesiastical superiors must deal most sympathetically and understandingly with the cases of those unfortunate priests, monks and nuns, who for some reason or other found it difficult to observe the rules and vows, and subsequently found themselves outside the canonical discipline of the Church. While hating sin, we must love the sinner. My appeal for understanding is based on my own experience of a number of cases, youthful and enthusiastic idealistic youths, both monks and nuns, who could have been led back to religious values and loyalty to the organised religion, had there not been such a scorched-earth policy and boat-denial attitude on the part of some superiors and canonists and moralists who fancy that they are the Church.

But I do know that there are a good number of monastic and ecclesiastical superiors who have seen life in its depths and entirety. Blessed are the stray sheep who have found such sympathetic superiors and brother-priests who have become a kind of raft of salvation to the shipwrecked sailors, those stranded Christian, Buddhist and Hindu monks and nuns lost in the storm-tossed world of *Samsara*, worldliness which is nothing but "sex and gold, *Kamini Kanchan*", as Sri Ramakrishna said.

In monasteries, whether Christian or Buddhist or Hindu, any violation of the vow of chastity is severely punished. If an unchaste monk refuses to correct himself, he will be dismissed, no matter

his position or social status, learning or achievements. The Rule of St Augustine, which is followed in the Dominican Order, in the Augustinian Order and a number of other monastic institutions, states:

"Nobody can forbid us to see womenfolk, but it would be a serious offence against religious chastity if we were to stare at them in such a way as to inflame our own passions, or theirs. The chaste person keeps the eyes chaste, for the trouble with chastity can begin with a mere glance. And whatever we are doing, let us remember that unseen eyes may be watching us, and that anyhow nothing escapes the all-seeing eye of God. Sometimes God seems not to notice as we do, yet we know it that His wisdom makes him so patient with us. The thought of offending Him will help a holy person to keep due custody of the eyes, and the old saying will come to mind, 'Lewd looks lead to hell'.

"The matter of custody of the eyes can be taken as an example of the working of fraternal correction, when God is in our midst, will help us to guard each other's virtue. If, for instance, in some public place, such a wandering eye is detected in one of the community, a warning should be given at once, so that a bad habit is not formed... If the first warning has had no effect, the Superior should be told, so that correction may also be made in private. If, after this, the charge is still denied, then the other persons consulted should be called in, and the offender even publicly accused by two or three witnesses. It is then for the Superior to appoint a salutary punishment. If the offender will not submit, and has not already departed, there remains only the remedy of expulsion—an act not of cruelty but of mercy, since the community is thereby saved from the contagious plague of bad example."

—*Rule of St Augustine*, translated by Sebastian Bullough, O.P.

In Buddhism also the sanctions against offenders against the vow of chastity are severe, including expulsion from the Order. One of the 227 *Pātimokkha* Rules of monastic conduct says:

"Whatsoever mendicant monk—who has undertaken upon himself the duty of self-training and rule of life, and has not thereafter withdrawn from the training or declared his inability to keep the rule—shall have carnal knowledge of any living thing, down even to an animal, he has fallen into defeat; he is no longer in communion."

These breaches against chastity, which sever the link of communion with the Buddhist monastic order, are clearly laid down. Any obstinate association with women, to take a woman in a secluded place, impure touch, etc., which are all given in detail in the rules of Buddhist Sangha, are reasons for dismissal from the Buddhist Sangha.

Rahul Sankritāyan was one of the outstanding scholarly Buddhist monks from India. But, when he was in charge of the Oriental Studies in Moscow, he fell in love with a Russian lady from whom he had a child. So Rahulji "lost communion" with the Buddhist Order. He was until his passing away the greatest authority and outstanding scholar in Hindi literature, but not in Buddhist monastic practice like my friend, Bhiku Jagadish Kasyap.

Unlike in Christianity, Buddhism and Jainism, the vow of celibacy for Hindu monks is not so rigidly enforced from outside with the strong hands of a presiding superior. It is essentially an individual vow and it is left to his own conscience to observe it strictly or loosely. The Hindu ideal of man's life begins with chaste, ascetic period of a Brahmachari student. Then he becomes a householder. It is after experiencing sex that he withdraws from worldly entanglements and becomes a hermit, and finally he strives to become an emancipated mendicant monk, ending his life circle with chastity and complete *Brahmacharya* with which he started his life. The life circle is completed when he is thus re-born as a child of God. This division of life into four stages is the most natural and the most ordinary course for an average man or woman. A Sankaracharya or a Vivekananda may be an exception. The only deflection from traditional individualism of Hindu monasticism is the modern Ramakrishna Order of Monks who are modelled

and drilled like the best organised Buddhist or Catholic monastic monks, while retaining all the distinctives of the Hindu religious traditions.

The vow of chastity is embraced simply because it is essential, indispensable for a monk to reach perfection, and not out of vanity, for human applause or social standing. [Buddha distinctly taught his monks: ,

“The life of chastity is lived not for the purpose of deceiving or prating to mankind, nor for the sake of any advantage, for reputation or success in one’s affairs...this life of chastity is lived, O monks, for the purpose of Insight and Thorough Knowledge...A life of chastity is lived for the sake of crossing the Flood (of earthly longings), and the purpose of putting an end to all misery.”]

—*Itivuttaka*, 36, 107

Similarly, in the Christian tradition, monastic vows are made with a view to reaching perfection “as our Heavenly Father is perfect”, not only by keeping the commandments of God, but also by following the evangelical councils of which the foremost are voluntary poverty and complete, incontinent chastity. Monks want to live chaste because they want to see God. “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God,” said Jesus. Sexual life thickens the crusts and shells of soul-life in man, while chastity has the great power to remove the veils of cosmic illusions, strengthen the body, mind and spirit in such a way that a man could penetrate behind the veil of *Maya*, and get at the heart of *Satya*, Truth, Reality.

In the history of monasticism the tussle between the champions of celibacy and the secularists decrying it is of great interest. In the lives of individuals there are some who climb up the ladder, and others who climb down the hill. Sometimes there is a steady march towards virtue and perfection and, at other times, steady decline, pitfalls into the ditches of

ns and vices. Likewise there are periods of great zeal in monasteries for the upkeep of the vow of celibacy and, at other times, laxity and lasciviousness entering even the cloisters. In Roman Catholicism—wherein could be seen the most historic, esoteric and monastic forms of Christianity—this tug-of-war between the champions of celibacy and its adversaries is most conspicuous in its history, specially after the second Vatican Council.

When wealth and rich endowments adorned the sanctuary of clerical quarters, there followed in its wake laxity in the observance of the vow of chastity. Peter Damian, Hildebrand, specially after he became Pope Gregory VII, and a number of popes, bishops and religious monks and nuns undertook the task of restoring monasticism and priesthood to the ideal of chastity. Legal enactments and sanctions and stringent measures helped to free the clergy from gross types of concubinage and open marriages and lechery. St Thomas Aquinas and St Bonaventure advocated moderation in dealing with the lapsed clergy in major orders or with monks engaged in pastoral duties. Bonaventure argued that "if the people altogether lost faith in the clergy, heretics should rise and draw the people to themselves as sheep that have no shepherd, and make heretics of them, boasting that, as it were by their own testimony, the clergy were so vile that none need obey them or care for their teaching." St Thomas Aquinas also pleaded toleration of evenunchaste and married priests, if the alternative were replacing them with still unworthy ministers. The clergy, both secular and regular, had sunk low in the Middle Ages while today, in the twentieth century, the ecclesiastical discipline with regard to the vow of celibacy is really many times better than ever was in centuries gone by. After the Second Vatican Council they glibly talk of "married clergy"

which is a contradiction in terms. Yet, better a married clergy with lay morality than clerical celibacy and monastic morality in lapsed priests, monks and nuns.

There is no doubt that the main strength of the Catholic Church and the Buddhist Sangha is the army of trained monks and priests, vowed down to chastity, with no family encumbrances. The clerical celibacy and monastic chastity add prestige and power to any religious organisation.

While speaking about the vow of chastity, the Book of Constitutions of the Order of Friars Preachers, says:

"Let the brethren carefully avoid dealings and familiarity with women, either because of the danger, or because of the bad name that arises so easily therefrom, or because of the scandal. Let the brethren be ever mindful of that chastity which our Father St Dominic, as he was dying, recommended to us in these words: 'If you also most diligently keep virginity without contamination, you will, through the purity of your lives and fragrance of renowned fame, forge ahead amidst the people in a most admirable way.'"

—*Constitutions*, 550, 1

Every religious order, whether Christian or Buddhist or Hindu, has laid down stringent rules and measures for the upkeep of this vow of chastity, which has power to bestow incandescent light of Truth Divine and burning flames of Love Divine to its votaries. In monasteries it is still possible to see young idealists who enter the sacred precincts of a cloister, monastery, priory or convent with an iron determination to keep the vow of chastity intact. They become literally like children, innocent, intelligent and charitable. They become like angels. Hence in monasteries there is a tradition to look upon chastity as the only virtue that makes us like angels. St Thomas Aquinas' genius was attributed mainly to his lily-white chastity. It is his in-

contaminate chastity that earned for him the title "Angelic Doctor", angelic in his virtue of chastity, angelic in his intuitive intellect, angelic in his zealous and apostolic life.

For monks and nuns, from time to time, are administered doses of edifying stories which inspire the young, idealistic, religious to keep the vow of chastity, in spite of the strongest pull of flesh and blood to violate it in thought, word and deed. The Franciscan monks know of their Father-Founder Francis rolling on thorns in order to conquer temptations against chastity. The Benedictines have the example of a saint like St Bernard who plunged himself into a frozen lake in order to conquer the lure of flesh and keep up the vow of chastity. The Dominicans hear of the teenager St Thomas Aquinas who flung a burning torch against a young girl who was introduced into his prison cell by his brothers to tempt him and sully his vow of chastity.

The Buddhist monks in their monasteries are reminded of the years of strenuous struggle of Buddha himself to master the tyranny of sense and sex and reach absolute chastity which, in the words of Buddha himself, "is the key to Buddhahood". Mental enlightenment and lustful confusion cannot co-exist in the same individual, at the same time. Hence Shakespeare has tersely said: "Lust and love are deadly enemies." Chastity gives birth to and fosters love, while incontinence gives birth to and fosters lust, with its mental darkness, irresolute will, self-pity and degradations. In the Buddhist *Jataka* stories and various anecdotes from the lives of Buddhist stalwart monks and saints which are told and re-told in monasteries, and the very cloistered and meditative environment are all powerful incentives for the inmates of monasteries to repulse

the lure of sex and climb the pinnacles of sex-sublimation through chastity.

In Hindu monasteries are also current many stories which instil and strengthen the desire in novices and aspirants to hold on to their vow of chastity. Young Hindu monks and isolated Hindu nuns hear of the examples of Sri Sankaracharya, Ramana, the life-long celibate monks of yore. Among the outstanding celibate nuns in Hindu tradition are Gargi, associated with the Brihadaranyak Upanishad, Sulaba occurring in the Mahabharat and Sabari in the Ramayana. Of late, Sister Nivedita, a Western disciple of Swami Vivekananda, did much to revive the old Hindu tradition of setting up convents for Hindu nuns. Recently, the Ramakrishna Mission has started two convents for Hindu nuns where the daughter of Sri K.M. Munshi of *Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan* is also a member.

While celibacy has its own history and romance in monasteries, it should be added that chaste married life of some sections of the Protestant clergy and the Hindu and Lamaist priests have brought family ideals to their best. I have seen for myself some married Anglican, Non-Conformist groups like the Presbyterians and Methodists, and extreme leftists in Protestantism like the Unitarians and Free Christians, setting the highest ideal of family life, at once shouldering the responsibilities of a householder and yet, reserving most of their mind and heart to things that belong to God and religion. Dr E. Stanely Jones, an American Methodist missionary in India, is an example. They follow the Socratic tradition in getting married, and yet becoming chaste, accepting marriage as a discipline for self-purification. About Socrates, a householder *sui generis*, we read:

"As to love, his counsel was to abstain rigidly from familiarity with beautiful persons, for he observed that it was not easy to be in communication with such persons, and observe continence. Socrates said that perhaps Cupids were called archers for no other reason but because the beautiful wound from a distance. For himself, he was evidently with respect to such matters that he could more easily keep aloof from the fairest and the most blooming objects than others from the most deformed and unattractive."

—*Xenophon's memorabilia of Socrates*

It was Socrates who advised married persons to have only an yearly sexual intercourse as the best rule of life. For weaker persons he advised the maximum rate of a monthly sexual indulgence. Beyond that, he said, one could indulge only by keeping the coffin ready by his side.

Socrates prayed: "that I may be beautiful within". It is this beauty of the soul monks and idealists seek by taking upon themselves life-long celibacy or married chastity. There is no greater esoteric of strength, stability, expansion and prestige of the Buddhist and the Catholic religion than its big army of celibate monks and nuns. Lapses there are; but on the whole, Buddhism and Catholic Christianity have given us the most wonderful specimens of monastic life, which is the inner core of spiritual perfection.

One question which many have asked me with regard to the vow of celibacy is this: "Who keeps the vow of chastity more stringently and better? The Buddhist monks or the Catholic religious men and women?" Well, comparisons are odious. I think both the monastics, the Buddhist Asiatics and the Catholic Europeans observe the vow of chastity as best as they can. If anyone were to press further and were to ask me where I found lapses fewer, my answer is "in Buddhism." But the fewer lapses in Buddhism is no matter of merit or pride for them,

because the Buddhist monks are not as active, dynamic, studious and adventurous as the Catholic monks and nuns. In other words, in Catholic monastic life there are rich varieties of religious realisation and adventures with the inevitable result of more lapses too. Roses have their thorns too.

There is no exaggeration to say that the scandalous lives of many Western missionaries, mostly monastics, has been a bigger impediment for the acceptance of Christianity in the East than their walled theology, sectarian interpretations of catholicity and superiority complexes.

As one who has been fried in a frying pan inside and outside my monastic seclusion, I wish to state that the Superiors in religious orders should handle most understandingly and psycho-analytically the problem of sex, chastity and continence in religious houses. It is the psychic attitude of mind that matters far more than physical integrity in the vow of chastity. If fornication and adultery could be committed with mere eyes, and even in thought and imagination, the primary concern of the superiors should be to instil this inner continence rather than punish its external manifestations. Pruning the branches is a mere palliative and temporary remedy, while removing the roots is the real issue. If Viswamitra the Sage and Solomon the Wise fell through sex, then mediocre monks also fall.

Often enough, there is the lack of biological maturity when a monk or nun makes the profession and undertakes the vow of chastity, obedience and poverty. I took my first vows at the age of twenty, after entering the seminary at the age of fifteen, and the monastery at the age of nineteen. When the master of novices, or the master of professed students, and the *gurus* in Hindu *maths* and Buddhist *sanghas* have no realistic understanding of the psy-

chology of sex and the world of problems connected with it, their dependent monks and nuns will have to suffer. Where there is no psychological handling and spiritual training in sex, there is often habitual solitary sins indulged in by monks and nuns, and not unfrequently lapsing into a kind of homosexuality, more often psychic than physical, when strict vigilance and enforcement of monastic rules are kept externally without inner conviction, creative vocational dynamics and outlets are closed for right social service.

It has been my universal experience to see the bare fact that the purer a monk is, the stronger he is, wider his vision, deeper his mystic touch with God and Reality. Mediocrity in monasteries thrives because monks remain satisfied with the social security monasteries offer them. They are self-satisfied with a mediocre observance of externals rather than tapping at the source of infinite potentialities inlaid in them, if only one could discover the laws of Self-unfolding from within. It is then, like worldlings, that monks also hug and hunt after self-delight rather than well-wishing, benevolence, *bene-velle* which is the essence of love. Physical self-delight is the core of lust, while well-wishing of real good is the essence of love. The Thomistic *velle alicui bonum*—to wish one well—is nearer the concept of love and charity than all these romances and lyrics which the film world around sing aloud and our street-boys and social butterflies repeat.

The vow of chastity, the foremost in monasticism, from a spiritual point of view, consists in the mental discipline for self-purification from all lustful thirsts and yearnings for the purpose of seeing God face to face: "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God".

Esoterically, chastity is the key that opens the doors to second birth. Our first birth is biological, and that is through sexual union. Our second birth, the *dwijahood*, about which all religious mystics speak, is from God-union. Real votaries of celibacy, the true monastics, are those "who are born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God" (John, I, 13). Even as a source of physical health and vitality, the observance of sex-sublimation is desirable for men, and essential for monks. As Patanjali says: "Continence being established, inexhaustible energy is thereby gained".

Psychologically, the vow of chastity is sex-sublimation and something more. In its positive sense, celibacy is nothing but the transcanalisation of the sexual urge from procreative and recreative indulgence into creative and healthy channels in philosophy, theology, ministry, literature, poetry, mysticism, fine arts, etc. By damming the torrential flood of sex, we can fertilise creative fields of human spirit "for the welfare and prosperity of many", as Buddha said.

In monasteries, Christian, Buddhist and Hindu, several methods are suggested for the preservation of virginity. Among these the most important are sense-control and meditation; prayer and corrective dietetics. The practice of using hair-shirts and flagellations, etc., have all fallen in disuse in monasteries today. Exceptions are still very many. I still keep a whip with me which I was using during my student days to control the ass and pig in me. Paul Brunton in his *Secret Path* says:

"If at any time your self-control is threatened by violent passions of whatever kind, immediately resort to the practice of rhythmic breathing exercises until the danger has passed."

This is a helpful yogic method to still the tempest of sexual urge. Mahatma Gandhi suggests cold baths in time of sexual excitement. Many other methods are suggested by various spiritual guides. But heartfelt prayer to God, to remain busily engaged in spiritual adventures, sense mortifications and a healthy, creative, positive attitude towards life are among the royal roads leading us to the pinnacles of celibacy which enable us to see and reach God, Nirvana, the goal of monasticism.

CHAPTER XII

RELIGIOUS VOWS: OBEDIENCE

"Obey your prelates and be subject to them. They are keeping unwearied watch over your souls, because they know they will have an account to give."

—*Heb.* XIII, 17

"There has been such a thing as letting mankind alone; there has never been such a thing as governing mankind with success. Letting alone springs from fear lest men's natural dispositions be perverted and their virtue laid aside. But if their natural dispositions be not perverted nor their virtue laid aside, what room is there left for government?"

—*Chuang Tzu*, 11

From an ethical and spiritual point of view, chastity or sex-sublimation is the foremost of all religious vows. But from administrative point of view, obedience to the constituted authority and statutory laws and rules of an institution is considered the most important of all religious vows.

In some religious orders obedience is extolled to such an extent that all other vows are made subservient to obedience. As mentioned earlier in this book, the Dominicans and some other religious orders take only the vow of obedience as being inclusive of all other vows. The Jesuits have obedience as the core and lever of their entire organisation. The famous phrase of St Ignatius of Loyola, a Spanish soldier who, after his conversion, became a soldier of Christ and founded the Society of Jesus, that obedience must be "corpse-like", *perinde ac cadaver*, has been caricatured in Protestant and anti-Catholic literature to an extent that makes human freedom null and void. Yet, human freedom is preserved in "corpse-like obedience" because each

case is to be decided on its own merits. Yet, it is historically true to say that the Jesuit Order is the most rigorous pattern of statutory obedience.

The real spirit of Jesuit obedience is not the militarism of Caesar, but the charity of Christ that makes them free; I wish to record my gratitude to such Jesuits who are free in God and want to build bridges between East and West. Such are men like P. Turmes, S.J. of Calcutta, Fr A. Esteller, Fr H. Heras, Fr E. Zuibitu and Fr A.M. Coyne from among the Bombay Jesuits who helped me and my work.

But both religious theocracy and monastic obedience in the Jesuit form are overshadowed by modern totalitarian states with their heartlessness, inhumanity and autocratic blockheadedness. "To believe, to obey, to fight," said Benito Mussolini, "is the creed of Fascism." But a thousand times better to believe and obey the Church than the State, because religions are faint echoes of God, while power politics is the bane of Caesar's kingdom.

In Buddhism, monks are obliged to be obedient to ethics. The ethical laws are taken as identical with Nature's laws. Buddhist obedience is slack to positive statutory laws. In Hindu classical monasticism, obedience to any external authority save to one's *guru* or superior is reduced to nil. Nay, those who are intent upon the task of reaching *Brahman* through ascetic and mystical paths are, by that very fact, released from all obedience to social, civil and political statutory laws and human authorities. Here, there is a fundamental difference between Christian monasticism and the Hindu-Buddhist world. The only form of Christian monasticism which comes nearer the ideal of individual initiative and freedom from obeying any external authority is the ideal of Christian hermitages.

The civil and ecclesiastical hierarchy, having jurisdiction over subjects, becomes necessary in the fallen state of man. In an ideal society there is no need of government officials, a ruling party, and the subject citizens. Governments, whether civil or ecclesiastical, are the badge of man's lost innocence. Where this innocence is restored, the *raison d'être* of governments, obedience, and the dividing wall between the ruling few and the subject many ceases to exist. If that government is the best which rules the least, it follows that in an ideal state of things there will be no more the dividing line between the ruling and ruled, the orders from above and obedience from below. In philosophical anarchism, individuals are to be emancipated to such an extent that their self-control is so complete, their morality, ethics, natural laws and God's will have all become one and the same thing that there is no room left for obedience to any human authority.

Obedience, as it is worked out in religious orders, in the Church and the State, presupposes that the obedient subjects are immature by themselves, and that they should be made dependent upon their superiors. Often this assumed superiority of authorities and alleged inferiority of the subjects are more legal than ethical, statutory than natural. Blind, unquestioned obedience can be demanded only from children under training, soldiers on duty or bearded babies and infantile adults. The herd instinct leads us on to follow suit, to fall in line with the rest, to be conformists of traditions and routine and to accept the order of things as they are, without ever questioning the how and why of things.

Obedience, as a moral virtue and as a religious vow, has its own justification. As moral virtue, obedience is necessary for regulating co-operative inter-action between children and parents, pupils

and teachers, servants and masters, subjects and authorities. As a religious vow, obedience is essential to guarantee corporate living and community life, its expansion and consolidation in various fields of organised ministry. A religious vow, as it is understood in monasteries, is defined as "a promise made to God regarding a subject of greater perfection and possible of achievement". This is a kind of paraphrase of the definition given in the Canon Law: *Promissio facta Deo de re quadam possibili et meliori*", Can. 1307, 1. In other words, the only justification of the vow of obedience is that it should lead us nearer to our spiritual perfection and make us better every day. It is not external, legal or statutory perfection that is the goal of monastic life, but inner transformation of man's mind and heart, his ethical perfection, spiritual regeneration that makes him a child of God in his transformed consciousness, in his thoughts, words, deeds, and the very attitude towards life.

But, unfortunately, in many religious orders, both in the West and in the East, in Christian and Buddhist organisations, a sort of mechanical conformity with established traditions, ceremonies and formalities are adjudged as the criterion of perfection, while tendencies of human spirit to go direct to God, Reality, through one's own initiative, spontaneity and creativity of personal experiments and vital experiences are all looked upon with suspicion from the top by the authorities. The custodians of law and order discourage, and often oppose, any attempt of subjects to reach God without any human intermediary. Many superiors think that they are the oracle of God, the mouthpiece of the Divine Will, the sole interpreters of the Divine commandments, and the exclusive repositories of grace and salvation.

It is this imprisoning of the keys of the Kingdom

of God, of ethics, morality and salvation within the closed fists of police forces that is most resented by the emancipated monks in monasteries. Mystics, intuitive thinkers and philosophic seers are *ipso facto* debarred from ever becoming superiors which however, would be the last job any free, open-minded monk would accept. Those who are intellectually emancipated and spiritually free will neither order nor obey others, except God and Nature. Then it is no more obedience to frail human beings but living in unison with the will of God and the heart beat of Mother Nature. All other legal statutes they will conform to only insofar as they agree with their conscience, now made attuned to God, our heavenly Father, and Nature, our earthly Mother.

It is in this field of obedience, I believe, the eastern world, the Hindu-Buddhist world has a significant contribution to make to the ideals of monasticism in the West. In the purest form of Hindu monasticism, when one is wedded to a life of total dedication to spiritual Self-realisation, he is freed from ceremonial, legal and even social and civil laws, so that unhampered and unfettered by human institutions, social conventions and positive laws he could embark upon bold experiments with the life of the Spirit. In Hinduism we have no heresies and heresy-hunting police forces, no inquisition fires and no fossilisation of beliefs. Buddha denied almost the entire Hindu orthodoxy, rejecting the authority of the Vedas and priests, the efficacy of rituals and sacrifices, the entire caste system and most of what are considered to be the essentials of Hinduism. And yet, the Hindus included Buddha among the ten incarnations of Vishnu, the second person of the Hindu Trinity! The reason is this. Buddha was a monk, and a monk is entitled to hold his own views and live his own life, and preach and spread his own religious ideals. Even atheists

like Kapila and Buddha, agnostics and anarchists were respected on par with the most orthodox Hindu monks like Sankara, Ramanuja and Ramakrishna. Nay, even hybrid blends between Hinduism and Islam, as was effected by monks like Kabir and Guru Nanak, have honoured niches in the Hindu pantheon. Orthodox Hindus find it a joy in worshipping Jesus, Francis of Assisi, Savanarola and many Christian saints because, as monks and nuns, they must be free, even if the saints were not Hindus or even Asiatics. That is the bane and beauty of Hinduism, its universal tolerance, its freedom for monks and nuns within its own fold and outside its respect for prophets and scriptures of other peoples and other religions, its all-embracing catholicity and all-sheltering maternal wings.

None has so masterly and realistically described the concept of obedience in monasteries as Thomas Aquinas who, after the Bible, enjoys the greatest authority in the Catholic Church. Aquinas teaches that man is bound to obey only God in everything—obedience to God and Nature's laws, to God's inspirations and whisperings. Whenever any directive or order from any superior, ecclesiastical, civil or religious, goes against God's directives, then we are bound to disobey, thus following the example of the Apostles who disobeyed the religious and civil authorities saying: "We must obey God rather than men" (Acts. V, 20).

With regard to the specific vow of religious obedience made by monks, Aquinas says:

"A religious makes profession of obedience with regard to regular community life; and in this field they are subject to prelates. Hence the religious are obliged to obey only in those things that pertain to regular community living. This obedience is quite enough for salvation. If one desires to obey in other matters also, that can spring from the summits of perfection, provided, however, such

an obedience is not against God or the professed Rule. Then, such an obedience will be no obedience."

—2-2, Q. 104, 5

In other words, obedience to human superiors is justifiable only for the sake of regular community living, and community living for the sake of God and salvation of souls. If this supreme target is lost sight of, obedience is no better than militarism in Caesar's camp. Then, obedience is a cloak for weak superiors to stifle initiative, spiritual enfranchisement and unfettered search after Truth and unchartered march in the evangelising,—or better, spiritualising—task, mission of the monk in the Kingdom of God.

It is true that there are religious monks for whom freedom means licence. It is true that often many subject religious monks and nuns seek enfranchisement not with a view to leading a better and higher life, but for the purpose of self-aggrandisement, vanity and sexual gratifications. To check this by the rod of authority invested in superiors is within the constitutional jurisdiction of superiors, since monks have vowed down their lives to attain perfection.

But, it also happens, that the reason for clash and conflict and tug-of-war lies at the doorsteps of superiors, when they want to safeguard their own position under the covering of obedience. They have not the courage to face Truth and Values in their face. Instead of opening all doors and windows for any new light that may come from any side, they choose to cling to the beaten track, customs, traditions, ceremonies and formalities. It is here the real test of obedience to Truth comes, as different from obedience to men and superiors.

I have been a victim of canonical sanction on a number of occasions in my life. I remember, some twenty seven years ago, in 1941, I happened

to quote from Asoka's *Pillar Edicts* from a Catholic pulpit in Perugia, in Central Italy. My superior then told me: "It is a sin to quote Buddha's sayings from our holy pulpit, because Buddha was an atheist pagan while Christ was God Himself."

On another occasion in England, I happened to compare a passage from the Fourth Gospel with a few verses in the Bhagavad Gita. I came under canonical gunfire, and my superior said: "Your Krishna and Ram are myths; your Bhagavad Gita is a bundle of contradictions. The next time you mix up Gita with the Gospel, I will suspend you from preaching."

Once, as a student in Rome, I was reading the writings of Swami Vivekananda and some works of Rabindranath Tagore, all books which I borrowed from the library of the Propaganda College. My Prior happened to pass by, watching the sort of books I was reading. He asked me the name of the books. He then looked at them, and said: "You are reading books without *ecclesiastical imprimatur*. You cannot read those pagan authors. They will destroy your faith. I would have confiscated these books if you had bought them. Now I order you to return them to the Propaganda College". And on that very same day I returned those books. I obeyed.

The Dominican Order was originally known as the "Order of Truth". Aquinas and Albert the Great had to meet the fiercest opposition when they tried to introduce Aristotle in the Universities. Nay, even St Thomas Aquinas, the foremost bulwark of Christian theological orthodoxy, was condemned as a heretic, after his death. His old teacher, Albert the Great, had to come all the way from Cologne to Rome to defend his disciple, the Angelic Doctor.

Now, it seems to me that the closed-door touch-me-not-ism in religion is a disease to be pitied rather than a thing to be fought against.

Some of the devotional books in Hinduism, Buddhism, Catholicism contain miracle stories, myths and fancies and silly stories of apparitions and so many humbugs and philosophical errors and so many unscientific statements. The Hindu *Puranas* and Buddhist *jataka* stories are very largely myths teaching ethics and spirituality. I happened to translate from Italian into English a book named "*Il Miracolo della Fatima*", for the Paulist fathers. It speaks of angels feeding children with the blood of Jesus and other stories. Yet, they get easy *imprimatur* from superiors. But any solid work on philosophy, comparative religion, mysticism and scientific research can only with difficulty—if ever—pass the ecclesiastical censor. Even the books of such a saintly, scholarly priest like Antonio Rosmini are put on the Index. Rosmini described only *The Five Plagues of the Church*, as he saw it in Italy and Europe and history. But the Church in India and China and in the wide world have fifty plagues to be cured of, before the Church could be really the Catholic Mother of all peoples, all nations, all cultures, of East and West.

The virtue and vow of obedience needs interpretation, modernisation so that Truth and Values may not be sacrificed at the moloch of a constituted authority or positive statutory, disciplinary rules. Among the various instances that throng in my mind, whenever I think of the vow of obedience in its ideal sense and in its practice, I may mention for the sake of illustration just two or three rather recent occurrences in my life.

I was put in charge of a parish in Worli, a small village in Bombay City, in 1956 by His Eminence—Cardinal Valerian Gracias, the Archbishop of Bom-

bay. Now, the new Vicar who was appointed there as my successor, began to encroach upon the school, for no other reason than to grab as much money as he could from the school. If the money were utilised for the betterment of the school or the parish, I would not have resented his encroachment. But apparently that was not to be. Yet, the new Vicar was ordering me to do his will, as *an act of obedience*. Then, I was a new comer to Bombay archdiocese. His Eminence Cardinal Gracias fell ill, and he went to Europe for treatment. Then the Vicar intrigued with the auxiliary Bishop to oust me from the school, so that he may get a free hand to control the finances of the school. Seizing the opportunity of the absence of the Cardinal, the Bishop ordered me under *obedience* to leave the school. The Vicar then ordered me out to leave the parochial house within twenty-four hours! And I had to obey both my Bishop and my Vicar; and I left the place in less than twenty-four hours. It was better for me to have left the place than to connive with the squandering of public money for private ends.

Then the Bishop put me under obedience in a parish in North Bombay. The Vicar there is one who wants to have everything under his thumb. In the name of obedience he would even control my thoughts, the persons I associate with, my extra-parochial activities. He would leave no initiative to any of his dependent priests. I fell a victim to another tyranny under the sanctimonious name of obedience. Feeling suffocated, for lack of any initiative in my specific field of monastic and Dominican and missionary apostolate, I started a new school, and re-started the Institute of Indian Culture, which was already started in Worli, Bombay, with the permission and blessings of the Cardinal. Then came the peremptory order from the Vicar to close down both the Institute and the new school

which I had named after St Thomas Aquinas, my blood-brother in the Dominican Order, and part of my intellectual heritage. This time I disobeyed the Vicar's injunction. Then the Vicar took the case to the Bishop alleging that my new school would adversely affect the interests of his parochial school. The Bishop then ordered me to close down my new school under strict obedience. I obeyed. But on my own, I left that parish and withdrew to my hermitage at the Retreat House, in Bandra, as the series of conflicts between obedience to the superiors and individual conscience were producing a serious crisis in my mind. We should obey to the extreme limits, but obedience should not land us in a lunatic asylum. We should bend as low as we can before authorities; but we should not let ourselves be broken up by the rod of authority in the name of obedience.

The Bishop, through the connivance of the Vicar, withdrew maintenance allowance as a sanction for my relinquishing the post in Mahim Church, and left me to my fate. After recuperating my mental health and regaining my spiritual equilibrium, I started a school for the destitute children of the locality. I approached the Bishop for permission and he said, "This school will also have the same fate as your St Thomas Aquinas School." He threatened to close it down under obedience. At that juncture, Providence visibly seems to have come to my rescue, when the large-hearted Mons. Vivian Dyer, the Vicar General of the Archdiocese, intervened and he blessed our apostolate of mercy to the underdogs of God. So, now our work continues and grows in such a way that our Welfare Society for Destitute Children and its affiliated institutions are well-established which can be beaten by God, but no more with the episcopal rod.

In other words, the ideal of obedience is the

soundest law in monastic organisations. But, as it works out in individual cases, it is the most delicate and thorniest of all religious vows. If the superiors and subjects understand each other and assume divided responsibilities on a co-operative basis, motivated by love of God and souls, then many of the anomalies arising from the clash and conflict between the subjects and authorities could be removed, or at least softened and eased. But military obedience and unquestioned blind following cannot help in the evolution of free souls.

St Augustine, that master-mind and patriarch of monasticism, gives the following norm with regard to obedience and broad-based superior-subject relations. He says in his Rule:

"The superior should set out to serve the community, and not merely to command. High in honour but humble before God and his (her) community, he should always set a good example, be ready to give correction, consolation and comfort where needed, be infinitely patient... A high station is a place of danger, and subjects must bear in mind that their obedience is an act of mercy, not only to themselves, but also to their superior."

—*Sebastian Bullough O.P.'s translation, Life of the Spirit, Vol. VIII, July, 1953.*

I know too well a number of cases in which monks have become victims of misunderstanding, vindictiveness and repression from their superiors under the mantle of obedience. Sometimes, monks reach a stage when they have to choose between running away from their monasteries, or ending up in a lunatic asylum. At least once in life I reached that stage, and I walked off from the Blackfriars Priory, Oxford on 7th September, 1943. Nowhere could we see the truth of the saying: "Letter kills, but the spirit vivifies", so clearly as in the lives of monks and their observance of the vow of obedience. It is not mere luck, fate, *Kismet* or position of the constellations up in the skies that explains

the smooth running and harmony between superiors and subjects. It is the reasoning capacity, a large-hearted will, a live and let-live attitude, a give-and-take policy rather than the boat-denial and scorched-earth policy of some superiors who do not take obedience as a real religious vow that helps individuals to reach spiritual perfection but as a weapon for ruling and governing. Or else, obedience becomes a cloak for superiors to hold on to their own with diplomacy, intrigues and touch-me-not-ism in religion. Even art cannot exist for art's sake; art is for Self-realisation's sake. Much less can any government exist for government's sake. It exists for the spiritual and material welfare of the people governed.

This sort of mechanical obedience to arbitrary and capricious orders of superiors, this clinging on to the letter at the expense of the spirit, is by no means restricted to Christianity alone. It is a disease prevalent in the Hindu-Buddhist world as well. The more intellectual, enterprising and missionary type a monk is, the more mystical and unconventional he becomes, the greater the opposition he is likely to encounter from his superiors.

I have known some five monks of the Ramakrishna Mission Order who have been expelled on the alleged reason of disobedience. One of them is still in England, Swami Avvyaktananda, whose theories about, and propagation of, what he called "Vedantic Communism", brought him in conflict with his superiors at Belur Math, the Headquarters of the Ramakrishna Mission Order of Monks near Calcutta. How some of these superiors in Hinduism, Catholicism, Buddhism and other great religions are afraid of ideas! How they continue heresy-hunting amidst their own brethren and arrest every new adventure of mind plunging into the infinite world of thought and ideas by using their rod

of authority! While the same superiors will encourage the grossest forms of devotional practices, stories of apparitions, miracles, mechanical mumbling of prayers, any critical, scientific and comparative study of philosophies and religions are discouraged, discredited, censured, and often condemned and placed on the Index!

As Father Isaac Thomas Hecker proved in his life, sometimes disobedience to statutory orders of certain superiors is essential to achieve the real goal of the monastic life. Fr Hecker disobeyed his Provincial, and even the General of the Redemptorist Order in order to bring back the original, creative, dynamic spirit of monastic life, by founding his Missionary Society of St Paul in New York in 1858. There is the case of Fr George Tyrrell who was dismissed from the Society of Jesus because of his ideas and books. Instead of that healthy, positive facing the challenge of ideas and life, many superiors resort to the short cut, the negative method of cutting, pruning, cudgelling and torturing men with ideas and initiative. In modern times, Mahatma Gandhi has set us an example of what he called "Civil Disobedience" in order to fight political wrongs. I believe religious disobedience also becomes a necessity to right religious wrongs in society, Church and in Hindu-Buddhist monasteries.

In ethics and morality and in the councils of perfection a man has no choice to disobey, because ethics is the law of his being. The Commandments of God and Nature's laws cannot be disobeyed except with grave damage to the transgressor. But these positive statutes which have nothing to do with the perfection of human spirit, nothing to help a man to become holier, purer and truer every day have to stand or fall on their merits. If the commands of superiors hold no water, and if they dwarf,

stifle and kill your spirit, it becomes your duty to bypass, or even disobey them.

If I disobey the statutory rule of making two hours of meditation every day, that will hurt me. But, if any superior orders me not to read or study the Hindu-Buddhist world, in which I am born and which forms part of my blood stream, I have to think twice before I obey it. Or if I go hungry and, to meet my own needs, I have no other alternative but to make use of my journalistic and literary experience both as part of my teaching mission and as a means of earning my livelihood, I have to follow my conscience, even if superiors order me not to write and let my pen rust and rot.

My Bishop advised me not to contribute articles to "WORLD MISSION", a Catholic quarterly edited by J. Fulton Sheen of New York, even when the editor invites me to continue to write for them. The Bishop says, "By writing for American papers you may say something which may hurt some bishop here in India." But is this an argument? If we go wrong, correct us with the charity of Christ. If we don't, then why do you stop us? A certain Bishop and superior asked me to obey their injunction that I must leave this hermitage at the Retreat House. For me to cling to this hermitage is a matter of life and death. And yet, they want to try my obedience simply because it is their order, and simply because they are my superiors. When this hermitage was inhabited by rats and snakes for the last quarter of a century none even thought of this abandoned hut. Now that I have occupied it with the permission of the Cardinal, Archbishop of Bombay, it becomes a test case of obedience, even if it meant death to my body and soul!

Nothing hurts me more than to mention a few instances to show how the vow of obedience works in practice. While the vow of obedience is holy

and necessary, its application needs sanctity on the part of superiors. But self-criticism is better than to be a Cicero in one's own home. As experience is a great teacher, we should have no illusions with regard to the unredeemed human nature in both superiors and subjects. We cannot leave men in perpetual tutelage. The pedagogic mission of superiors ends with the birth of personal responsibility in us. After all, when we are dead and gone, our Judge is not any superior or king or Pope, but God and God alone, before whom we are all responsible for lights, graces and duties of our call.

All positive man-made laws which subjects obey need constant revision, re-adjustment and adaptation to the changing needs and times. Before Indian Independence, the Indian Bishops, including the Papal Delegate, Mons. Ladislav Zaleski, condemned Brahmmandav Upadhaya, a Christian convert from Hinduism, because he held that, as an Indian and as a Catholic, he must be true and loyal to both Indian culture and the Catholic Church. In the past, missionaries published apologetic books with ecclesiastical *imprimatur* decrying Hinduism and Buddhism in the worst terms, caricaturing the real and alleged faults, and denying even the basic truths. In those days there was the British Lion to protect the extravagancies of missionaries who only wanted yes men and obedient acolytes in their service.

The colour bar of the Europeans in India and the British authority were once questioned by a few Indian Catholics; and they were branded as "disobedient Catholics". When a few Christian missionaries from the West, both Catholic and Protestant, became Hindus and Buddhists, the superiors called them "traitors". Verrier Elwin, Stokes and C.F. Andrews are outstanding examples. They excommunicated them, discredited them.

¹ Their writings were branded as heretical and pagan by those censors who knew nothing, or next to nothing of the spirit of Indian culture or the philosophy of the Hindu-Buddhist world. India and China alone form about half of mankind. And these superiors expect us to brush aside our blood, culture and civilisation as dross, simply because our forbears embraced Christianity, because we accept Christ as our Saviour, God, the Logos incarnate, Jesus as the bridge between the East and the West, man and God. If the writings of Indian nationalists were to pass ecclesiastical censure, which is in the control of the Western bosses, their writings would never see sunlight.

After stating that there are anomalies and abuses in exacting obedience from subject monks, I must also add that these anomalies are the inevitable results of the life-affirming aspect of Christianity. Archbishop Thomas D'Esterre Roberts, S.J., the former ruler of the Bombay Archdiocese, has recently published a book entitled "*Black Popes*". In this book he mentions how the vow of obedience or the part of monks and clergy has been abused by many superiors, including some Popes. In between the lines of that book one can see the tug-of-war between the ideal concept of obedience and its manifold abuses in monasteries, dioceses and the church administration as a whole.

I believe in the great distinction made by Albert Schweitzer in world-affirming and world-denying religions. Of the world-affirming religions, the foremost is historical Christianity built on the Judeo-Greco-Roman civilisation. Of the world-denying religions are the orthodox sections of the Hindu-Buddhist world. Christianity does not seek escape from the evils of the world; but faces them and seeks fulfilment in and through the evils, sufferings and crosses of life, as contrasted to the ge-

neral tendency of escapism in the broad theology of the Hindus. In this very life-affirming urge of Christianity are inherent these anomalies, these paradoxes and heart-rending dichotomy. Christianity is nothing if it is not a continuous revolution in our souls, hearts and minds. Christianity began as a challenge and a revolution, with total reversal of accepted standards, upholding imponderable values and values alone, crucifying worldly standards. This revolution will continue as long as Christianity survives on the face of the earth. A faint echo, a distant ripple of that tug-of-war between military obedience of the kingdom of Caesar and Christian obedience in the Kingdom of God is watched in cloistered monasteries.

But in the Hindu and Buddhist orthodox circles, religious bigotry, obscurantism and ultramontaniam are still worse than in Christianity. A great personal friend and fellow-tramp of mine, the Rev. Bhikhu U. Tittila was branded as a heretic and renegade by a Burmese senior monk, because the Bhikhu exchanged his orange robes for a Western suit, while he was working in London, as though the whole monastic core were in his dress. For some orthodox Hindus, "religion is in their cooking pots", as Vivekananda said. The caste system, based on birth, and untouchability are the worst social cancers of Hinduism.

Christian monasticism has its faults and failings; but in the Hindu-Buddhist worlds faults and failings are many times more and, certainly, not any less. In the ideological field, the vanguard of revolutionary Christianity, the mystic and esoteric bands are far more receptive and assimilative of new ideas than the widest and broadest approach to life and religion in the Hindu-Buddhist world. If anything is broad, Catholic Christianity is still broader; if anything wide, Catholicism is still wider.

If any religion is catholic, Roman Catholicism is still more catholic than any other religion claiming catholicity. If Hinduism were a sea of religious experiences and varieties of religious realisation, then Catholicism is an ocean, still wider.

But to discover that catholicity of Christianity we have to go back to the pages of the Gospel, to the early Apostolic and Apologetic Fathers, to the mystics and thinkers and saints of Christianity. But if we go to some canonists, liturgists and superiors, some devotion-mongering parish priests and bishops, we will be disillusioned. In the same way, to understand the ideals of religious vows we have to go to Basil, Benedict, Francis of Assisi, Dominic of Guzman, Savonarola, Catherine of Siena and their likes. They had experience of life; they sensed the heartbeat of souls throbbing for the Life Divine. They understood the mystery of the Cross in its depth, width and height. The fourth dimension of the Cross was to them Values.

Obedience, in its ideal sense, is the only one vow essential in monastic life. For that very fact it needs closest study, constant vigilance and adaptability so that a monk may not live for obedience, but obedience for the perfection of the monk; not man for the sabbath, but sabbath for man. Superiors, rules and the very Church are only means; *necessitate medii* as the Catholic Theologians teach—God or Self-realisation alone is the goal. Everything is to be obeyed insofar as it helps that goal. The Ignatian rule of *tantum quantum* is valid for the vow of obedience also, and not merely in the use of creatures.

Religious vows are aids for the liberation of the spirit of man, never a source of bondage and stifling and crippling thought. We need a little more reasoning and what St Paul calls "rational service" in monasteries too. Then we shall help to cleanse

monasteries from accumulated dross and cobwebs and renew them, attuning the life therein to the letter and the spirit of the patriarchs of monasticism, the ideal of attaining higher perfection of the spirit through love of God and man.

After the Vatican Council II, the problems and vows of obedience and chastity etc., are ever under the gunfire of secularists, skin-deep rationalists and empirical physicists. Pope Paul spent sleepless nights sensing the shape of things to come, reading the signs on the walls. As a loyal child of the Church I must tell to Peter in person: "Do not yield, do not give in when the essentials of the Gospel and Evangelical perfection are in question. Better a few loyal followers of the folly of the Cross of Christ than legions of worldly butterflies around the Pope and the Church. There is no priesthood without the vow of celibacy and obedience to the evangelical counsels. Married clergy is no clergy in Catholicism, Hinduism and Buddhism. With St Paul I would urge and say to my Father, Pope Paul: *Nolite conformari huic saeculo* ...Yes, no diplomatic pact with this world. *Transit enim figura hujus*—passes and fades away the shape of this world. It is not in cardinals' red hat, nor in the Vatican treasures lies our hope, but in the wisdom of the Cross, in "Jesus and Him Crucified". Return, then, to us our heritage, Holy Father, the barge of Peter turned Christwards, Puritywards, Godwards and not to the United Nations and state governments. Then Pope Paul will resurrect the spirit of Pope John XXIII who received me and infused his spirit into me on 30th June 1962, and charged me to continue my mission for the uplift of destitute children, for the East-West Understanding, and for revival of the perennial values of that Catholic Church which is the Mother of East and West, Hindus, Christians, Buddhists, Moslems and all humans on this planet.

CHAPTER XIII

RELIGIOUS VOWS—POVERTY

"Let us, then, live happily, we who own nothing can call nothing our own; let us be like the Shining Ones (Abbassara gods) who are nourished on love."

—*Dhammapada* 200

"Jesus said to him: 'If thou has a mind to be perfect, go home and sell all that belong to thee, gave it to the poor, and so the treasure thou has shall be in heaven; then come back and follow Me'." —*Mathew* XIX, 21

"By the establishment of voluntary poverty, all wealth comes to the Yogi." —*Patanjali* Yoga II, 37

Voluntary poverty is one of the essential vows of monastic life in Buddhism, Hinduism and Christianity. The essence of voluntary poverty consists in nipping possessive greed in its bud; killing every form of acquisitiveness for personal proprietorship and self-gratification; restricting the use of things to the bare minimum compatible with the health of mind and body, soul and spirit.

Poverty, in monastic sense, is not indigence. It is not destitution either. Poverty is the voluntary act of curtailing one's wants and material necessities to the barest essentials so that the mind of man, freed from attachments to worldly possessions and pleasures, could devote itself with undivided attention to the things of the spirit.

It is well known that the patriarchs of monasticism in both the East and the West, in Christianity and the Hindu-Buddhist worlds, of their own deliberate choice, gave away their landed properties and riches, and literally followed the example of

Buddha and Christ. Jesus described his voluntary poverty in these touching words: "The foxes have their holes, the birds have their nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head". When the Jews wanted to make Jesus their king, at the time when Jesus had reached the zenith of his fame and glory prior to his crucifixion, he withdrew from their midst and fled to solitude. Although born a prince, Buddha claimed to possess nothing but his begging bowl and his monastic robes.

A traditional Hindu monk owns nothing except his saffron robes, begging bowl and his staff. Monks may take with them a few books, a rosary, a pen to write with, and other minor belongings that will help him in fulfilment of his ministry. Even then, in strict religious orders, monks do not really own even their clothes and books and begging bowls. They only *use* them, without owning them. In Christian monastic and religious societies, on books kept in a monk's or friar's cell, one can read the words: "*Ad usum fratris...* For the use of Brother so and so". It is the community that owns books, clothes, houses and properties, not individual monks.

It is well known that religious orders, when they sprang pure and unspotted from the hearts of their respective founders, insisted on the strictest observance of poverty. Religious fervour, enthusiasm to do great things for the "glory of God and salvation of souls", for "the spread of Dharma" usually cools down when wealth and social security enter the cloistral walls. That is why from time to time there take place religious reforms within monastic orders. When St Theresa of Avila and St John of the Cross wanted to reform the then rich, indolent and lax Carmelite monasteries, they met with strong opposition from rich potentates, superiors and proteges of lax Carmelites. But they forged ahead in the teeth of opposition, they restored

the pristine ideal of voluntary poverty in their Order.

It is well known how Francis of Assisi married but one monastic ideal, and that is what he himself called "Lady Poverty". Here is a terse account of Francis of Assisi himself about his wedding Lady Poverty. Standing alone, clad in ragged clothes, Francis explained the ideal of religious poverty to Pope Innocent III, in these parabolic words:

"There was once a very beautiful but poor girl who lived in a desert. A great King saw her and was so enamoured of her beauty that he took her to wife. He lived some years with her and had by her children who united their father's features to their mother's beauty; then he returned to his palace.

The mother reared her children very carefully; and when they were grown up, spoke to them in these words: 'My children, you were born of a great king; go to his court, and he will receive you with all the regard due to your birth'. The children then came to the king's court. The latter, seeing the beauty of their countenance, said to them; "Whose sons are you?" They replied: 'We are the sons of that poor woman who lives in the desert'. The king at once affectionately embraced them, saying: 'Fear not, you are my sons, and if I feed my officers with meats from my table, how much more careful should I be of you who are my own children?'

This king, most Holy Father, is Our Lord Jesus Christ. This amiable and beautiful girl is Poverty who, despised by everyone, found herself in this world as in a desert. The King of kings, descending from the height of heaven and coming down upon earth, so loved her that He married her in the crib. He had several children by her in the world of wilderness—apostles, anchorites, cenobites and, finally, in the unhappy times we are passing through, your little servant and His disciple. And He himself assured me that he would provide for our subsistence, as he provided for our elder brethren. And He told me: 'If I feed mercenaries, and even the enemies of my name, with how greater reason shall I take care of those who are my sons and heirs! And if I cause my sun to shine upon sinners and distribute to them the goods of the earth, with how

much more reason shall I give their daily bread to those who make a vow of following the Gospel counsels!"

The romance of Francis of Assisi with his Lady Poverty is depicted in Franciscan legends and in religious art in the Churches of Assisi by Giotto, Cimbeau and others. Yes, Christ lived the poorest. To the rich man who approached him asking what he should do to enter the Kingdom of God, Jesus replied: "Keep God's commandments". But when the young man pressed further and asked what more he lacked, Jesus replied: "If you desire to attain perfection, then go, sell all your property, distribute it to the poor, and come and follow Me". In obedience to this injunction, many monks and saints in Christendom have relinquished all wealth, pomp and pageantry and, banking on Providence alone, they lived and worked for the highest ideals of religious realisation. It is this voluntary, free renunciation of belongings and ownership of things that a monk gives up when he takes the vow of poverty. Socrates, Diogenes, Pythagoras and others in ancient days, Mahatma Gandhi, Henry Thoreau, Leo Tolstoy, Albert Schweitzer and others in our own days have proved in their lives that higher spiritual perfection is impossible without voluntary poverty, reducing needs to the basic minimum so that the spirit may be liberated from entanglements and enticements of gold and silver. Sex and gold are the main attractions of the world. Monks break their fetters asunder by taking vows of chastity and poverty.

The entire Franciscan movement arose as a protest to the luxury and indolence in ecclesiastical courts and rich monasteries of the Middle Ages. Francis lived poor to the end that he earned the title, *Il poverello di Assisi*—the Poor One of Assisi. Francis recommended strict observance of this vow to all his followers when he told them:

"I, Francis, the least of your brethren, wish to follow the life and poverty of our Most High Lord Jesus Christ and His Most Holy Mother, and to persevere therein to the end. I also beg you all, whom I consider as my ladies, and earnestly conjure you to conform always to this life, and to this glorious poverty. Beware of any departure whatsoever from it, and of hearkening to contrary maxims and counsels thereon."

These words he addressed to Franciscan nuns organised jointly by Francis and St Clare. In the Franciscan Rule, the saint himself worded the observance of monastic vows in such a way that there could be no ambiguity whatsoever about the strictest observance of poverty. So did St Dominic and St Benedict, and other patriarchs of western monasticism, enjoin strictest voluntary poverty on their followers.

The vow of poverty is still more strictly observed in the Hindu-Buddhist world than in the West. When I was in the company of Buddhist monks, or Hindu hermits, I have myself gone with them for the round of alms. With the begging bowl in hand, and downcast eyes, at the gates of householders we stood. Usually the food given from two or three houses is enough to sustain a monk for the whole day. The Hinayana monks in Ceylon, Burma, Thailand and other countries have kept up the same essential features of Buddhist monks of Buddha's own days. Buddha had told his followers:

"The mindful ever struggle on; they seek to be detached from their place and abode. They give up their house and possessions, even as swans who desert their pool. Those who have no possessions, who eat their food with prescribed discrimination, who have reached causeless and unconditioned freedom through perceiving the emptiness of the transitory cannot be followed, just as the track of birds in the sky."

That does not mean the Mahayana monks have deviated from the original ideal of Buddhist poverty.

Behind the gorgeous and colourful rituals, ceremonies and wealth of Tibetan monasteries, there is the ideal of monastic poverty kept intact, as individual monks still live poor, own nothing as their own. But centuries of political and religious power wielded by the lamas of Tibet has taken away much of that initiative and driving power from them. They are enclosed too much in their own little world, without letting more light shine upon them from abroad. Hence Tibet fell a prey to the Chinese expansionism.

In monasteries, whether in the Christian West or in Hindu-Buddhist East, although individual monks do not own and possess, the community does at times possess vast estates with annual income amounting to a million or more rupees. Monks become too secure, enjoy that economic security that saps creativity, dynamism and adventure which are inseparable from an ideal life of a monk called for risky living. In rich monastic houses, the inmates live too rich, eat dainty dishes and dress too smartly. Some Christian monks are chain smokers; some priests drink heavily. In some Christian monasteries monks own or use motor cars, gold watches, radiograms, golden fountain pens and rimless fashion glasses. They build palaces, live in mansions, invest capital in business enterprises, hoard up huge bank balances in national and international banks. Some religious orders own so much landed property that governments have to restrict their acquiring more lands and extending their already big estates. This has happened in India and China and elsewhere. In Europe, during the suppression of monasteries and religious orders, their huge estates, movable and immovable properties were confiscated by secular governments which are more ready and greedy to rob as the monks to retain their wealth. As late

as 1871, huge monasteries and their belongings were seized by the Italian Government, after the Italian unification and *Resorgimento*. The Dominican monastery at Minerva in Roma, where I spent nearly five years of my monastic life, with its buildings and huge library—*Bibliotheca Casanetense*, which contains over twenty thousand rare books and several thousands books on philosophy, theology, culture, art, history, etc.—have all been confiscated and were then in the hands of the Fascist Government. Even after the Lateran Treaty of 1929, when Mussolini for Italy and Cardinal Gaspari for the Vatican signed an agreement for peace and justice, only the Basilica of Minerva and a few monastic cells were left in the hands of the Dominicans, while the main historic Dominican monastery remained and still remains in the hands of the Government. During the suppression of the Jesuits in Spain, they lost colossal wealth and property.

In spite of the religious vow of poverty, due to centralisation and authoritarianism, there comes up what might be called collective greed for collective wealth in religious orders. That goes against the letter and spirit of monastic poverty. Then, there are too many conventional iron walls built between various religious orders so that each religious order becomes a kind of a church within the Church, with its own autonomy and secret chambers and closed door conclaves. The Jesuits will hardly put a non-Jesuit monk in a place of responsibility inside their Society. Similarly, a Hindu monastery will not welcome a Buddhist monk to stay with them as one of their inmates, and vice versa. It seems to me, that there should be closer exchange of experiences and ideas between members of various religious orders so that they may learn from each other and enrich themselves by expanding their religious consciousness and helping to engender a

much broader concept of monasticism in general, which is a great bond of unity between the East and the West, the Christian West and the Hindu-Buddhist world.

The secular clergy in Christianity do not take the vow of poverty. They take only the vows of chastity and obedience. The result is that there is individual acquisitiveness and possessive grip in many clergymen. There is clerical jealousy among priests and feminine jealousy among nuns much more than between society ladies. Many among the secular clergy lead a selfless life; they give away their income and salary or allowances to befriend the poor and the afflicted. If they hoard up and help their relatives and dependents, it is because they have not that security which a religious order gives to their monks and nuns. Hence, priesthood becomes like any other profession. At times, priesthood becomes a means of livelihood, like a lawyer's or physician's profession. Although the secular clergy do not take the vow of poverty, and the religious and monks take the vow of poverty, in actual practice, however, it is truer to say that the religious take the vow of poverty but seldom practice it, while the secular clergy do not take the vow of poverty, but often live poor.

Economic independence of the secular clergy, with their monthly salary and allowances, etc., is a great hindrance to acquiring perfection. The lack of the religious vow of poverty for the secular clergy means a world of difference between them and the religious. A secular priest, by the very nature of his vocation and ministry, lives an individualist's life, although, from a vocational sense, his life is corporate, being part and parcel of the diocese or the religious community of which he is an ordained minister. The individualism of the secular clergy is mainly responsible for so many

pitfalls in their lives, and the general cooling down of their earlier fervour and idealism which adversely affect his flock, whose shepherd a priest or monk is supposed to be.

The freedom which a secular priest enjoys to possess money and property as his own is at times a blessing, but often a curse; a blessing because he is free to use them for the benefit of the people; it is a curse because, he often uses his own and the church property for his own ends, to enrich his relatives and nieces. Nepotism and petticoat system exists not only in state governments but, at times, also in parochial houses and episcopal mansions.

There is, however, one point to be borne in mind when we speak of the vow of poverty and its strict observance. Christianity, being the foremost life-affirming religion in history, takes it for granted that wealth, collectively owned, can, if well used, be a source of manifold blessings to the people, and helpful avenues for sacerdotal zeal and spiritual ministry. Hence the latest types of Ford motor cars and helicopters and television sets can all be used by monks for their ministerial apostolate. Bishop Fulton Sheen of New York is one of the best Catholic telecasters in the United States; but he lives an austere, saintly and scholarly life which enables him to handle millions of dollars without being contaminated by them. He uses money and position as aids to serve the sheep of the Lord. Don J. Alberione, the Founder of the Pious Society of St Paul, uses the press, radio and cinema as means of religious propaganda.

In the Hindu-Buddhist world there is more conservative looking back to the past instead of forging ahead to the future, racing ahead of times. Hence stricter observance of the vow of poverty in the Hindu-Buddhist world may be the result of traditions, stereotyped ways of thinking, moving in grooves and ruts, without making religious, and monastic power

as a means to face the problems of life, we can offer solutions, or near—solutions, to many social, economic and political problems on a soul-spirit basis, as opposed to the power-politics and cut-throat economics of the worldly people.

Poverty, as a monastic vow, simply means detachment from possessiveness, from all attachment to the perishable things of this world so that the mind of man becomes inwardly rich by busying itself with the things of the spirit. With Socrates, wedded to voluntary poverty, we can also pray:

“O beloved Pan, and all ye gods whose dwelling is this place, grant me to be beautiful in the soul, and all that I possess of outward things to be at peace with those within. Teach me to think Wisdom the only riches, and give me so much wealth, and so much only as a good and holy man could manage and enjoy.”

CHAPTER XIV

MONASTIC STUDIES

"Every clerical religious order must have a centre of studies approved by the General Assembly or by the superiors. In all the houses of studies there should be strict observance of community life; or else students cannot be promoted to Holy Orders."

—*Cannon Law* 587, 1, 2

"That on which all the Vedas become eloquent,
That which to attain men become ascetics,
That for whose sake monks take the vow of chastity,
That I wish to unfold to you as OM (God)."

—*Kata Upanishad* i. 2, 15

"From the very beginning our Order is known to have been founded for the purpose of preaching and salvation of souls. Hence all our studies must primarily be directed to this objective, that we become useful for the soul-welfare of our neighbours. Closely allied to this goal is to teach and uphold the Truth of Catholic Faith both through educational institutions and through prolific literary activities. In order to achieve this objective, it is necessary that preachers and teachers, following the example of our Most Holy Father St Dominic, who only spoke with God or about God for the salvation of souls, should have their ministry springing from the abundance and plenitude of contemplation."

—*Constitutions of the Dominican Order* Ch. 1, 3

"As long as I live so long do I learn."

—*Sri Ramakrishna*

Of the common essentials in monastic orders of the East and the West, the obligation to study the Scriptures, Theology, Philosophy, Ethics and the culture of respective religions is one of the most important. As meditation, prayer, manual labour

and ministry are essential traits of monks, so are study, reading, writing, preaching and cultural apostolate, all motivated by God-realisation urge.

Anyone aspiring to enter any of the recognised religious orders of the Catholic Church must undergo a period of studies lasting from six to fifteen years. At the termination of the secular studies in a high school or university college, a candidate for Holy Orders in monasteries or seminaries must undergo at least seven years studying Philosophy, Theology, Scriptures, History, Liturgy and other subjects. The Jesuits have the longest course of studies and training lasting from ten to fifteen years. Each religious order has its own period of training and studies; but life-long study is an obligation incumbent on all monks and priests.

The studies in Hindu and Buddhist monasteries are not as systematic and thorough as in the Catholic Church. Yet, those Hindu and Buddhist monks, who become thorough authorities in their own fields are the products of individual exertion and study rather than of any systematic course of studies imparted to them in their monasteries. Whereas in the Catholic monasteries a full period of studies from seven to fifteen years is given with regular text books, examinations, qualified professors, regular lectures, writing of theses for degrees, etc., as we find in degree colleges or universities.

This period of studies is by no means the end of their training. The purpose of the seven years or more of a systematic course of studies is just to initiate the aspirants in the art of study and learning, to give them a mighty push, so that all throughout their lives they may keep up their liking and love for books, reading and studies. But it is a sad fact that many monks and priests, after their compulsory course of studies, give up serious studies alto-

gether, being satisfied with some trash reading, newspapers or some devotional and liturgical stuff.

The standard classical work for Catholic scholastics and monks is the Bible, the Fathers of the Church, notably St Augustine, St Jerome, Origen and others, the Schoolmen with Thomas Aquinas as their leader. In philosophy and Theology the religious orders of the Catholic Church take their stand on Thomas Aquinas. Pope Leo XIII, in his encyclical *Aeterni Patris*, says:

"Learned men, in former ages specially, of the highest repute in theology and philosophy, 'after mastering with infinite pains the immortal works of Thomas, gave themselves up not so much to be instructed in his angelic wisdom as to be nourished upon it. It is known that nearly all the founders and framers of laws of the religious orders commended their associates to study and religiously adhere to the teaching of St Thomas, fearful lest any of them should swerve even in the slightest degree from the footsteps of so great a man. To say nothing of the family of St Dominic, which rightly claims this great teacher for its own glory, the statutes of the Benedictines, the Carmelites, the Augustinians, the Society of Jesus, and many others, all testify that they are bound by this law."

No religion in the world gives such a disciplined training to its monks, priests and nuns as the Catholic Church. Once in London, Ragini Palme Dutt of the C.P.I., the then editor, *Labour Monthly*, told me; "The Catholics give the most thorough training to their priests". I replied, "Yes, as the Communists for their ministers." He was right.

In all the houses of studies of the Church there are good libraries with ancient and modern literature. All the authoritative theological and philosophical works are to be found in many Catholic monasteries, even the latest books on Buddhism and Taoism. In most Catholic libraries of England I have been to, I was happy to find the complete set of the *sacred books of the East*, edited by Max Muller,

the *Harvard Oriental Series*, the *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, edited by James Hastings and other standard works on subjects relating to philosophy and theology. Then you will find Kant, Hegel, Marx and Engels, all sitting quiet in Catholic libraries. This may refute the charge of myopic and sectarian ideologies of the Catholic Church, which, by and large, is broader than many other religions.

Although almost all modern and critical works on religion, philosophy, social sciences, etc., are available in a monastic library, still there is a forbidden section in it where only specialised scholars are permitted to go. Even the Hastings Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics, Max Muller, Monier Williams, T.W. Rhys Davis and others are in the forbidden section. In some monastic libraries there is a section named "Hell". Books contained therein are supposed to lead the readers to hell, unless perhaps exorcised by a priest! In the "Hell" section of monastic libraries are found Buddhist journals, Hindu magazines, communist literature, etc.

In other words, in many Catholic monasteries, all material for an objective study of religions and cultures of the world are available in their libraries; but monks are not allowed to drink freely from them for fear lest they "lose faith and become atheists"! We can understand a certain protection and safeguard given to children until they grow up; but to keep monks and priests perpetual bearded babies is one of the evils that is to be removed in monasteries. Only seedlings and tiny plants need fencing all around. But an oak tree must be allowed to grow, exposed to torrential monsoon rains or tropical heat. Nothing can affect an oak, while jasmines and lilies fade away in the tropical sunshine or shower. Monks must be oaks, free in their inquiry, fearless in stating their honest convictions, emancipated in their vision and wisdom of life,

without becoming lawyers and clerks of vested interests of a particular religion, society or state.

In Hinduism there are no powerfully organised monastic institutions like in Buddhism and Catholicism. The only exception is the modern Ramakrishna Mission Order of monks which, while taking its stand on the basic culture of Hindu India, leaves its doors wide open to receive any new light from any other source, whether that comes from Christianity, Islam or Communism. But even in the Ramakrishna Mission Order there is nothing like a systematic study of the Hindu Religion, its theology, philosophy and culture for a period of years. Studies are left to individuals to pursue or neglect.

I have stayed in a number of Hindu monasteries, and for over two years in various monastic houses of the Ramakrishna Mission Order, not as an outsider but as a close friend from within, without however, taking any formal membership. I think the Ramakrishna Mission Order and Mission are still basking under the glorious sunshine of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda, clinging to literally and stubbornly to the letter rather than the spirit of the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna, the prophet, and Swami Vivekananda, the Founder of the Order, the Apostle, the St Paul of the Ramakrishna Mission.

Among the ex-Ramakrishna Mission monks, I happened to meet one in Almora who was dismissed from the Order because he was too sympathetic towards the Christian monastic institutions, without actually taking membership of any Christian organisation. His interpretation of the *Gospel of Ramakrishna* and the dynamic teachings of Swami Vivekananda clashed with the official position held at Belur Math, the headquarters of the Ramakrishna Mission.

In other words, even in such a recent Hindu monastic order—Vivekananda died only in 1902 A.D.—there comes a kind of immutable dogmatism and official orthodoxy which block the path of free inquiry into religious phenomena, and theologies inside and outside their religious order. If Lhasa is compared to the Vatican, and the Dalai Lama to the Pope, then there are miniature vaticans and popes in all the religious institutions and monasteries of the East and the West. The Master General of the Jesuits in Rome is for this reason nicknamed "the Black Pope". Each superior is considered to be a small pope in his own field, a pope who can control even the thoughts and studies of his subordinates, more on the strength of his jurisdiction than based on religious love.

In Hindu monasteries there are elder monks who supervise and elucidate the study of the Hindu scriptures such as the Vedas, the Upanishads, the Gita, the Philosophical systems, etc. Each sect within Hinduism—for the Hindu religion is subdivided into innumerable sects with distinct prophets and founders and even scriptures for each—study their own tenets, and seldom makes a research into other sects of Hinduism itself, and much less of any non-Hindu religion, except from an apologetic point of view to show that their system is the best of all.

I happened to stay for some time with the monks of the Arya Samaj, a theistic reform movement founded by Swami Dayananda Saraswati (1824-1883), in one of their main centres in Calcutta. What surprised me most was their putting the writings of their founder on par with or even on a greater authority than the Hindu Scriptures themselves. It is a stern theistic and anti-caste movement. Their Bible is the *Satyartha Prakash*, the *opus magnum* of Dayananda the Founder. Against the Moslems and

Christians they are so fanatical that it is difficult to reason with them. They take their stand on the *Satyartha Prakash*, a book in which Dayananda treats with scorn and ignorance Islam and Christianity. They are equally intolerant of the orthodox Vedantic monism. On this point there was once a strong tussle and split between the Arya Samaj and the Theosophical Society. Col. Olcott mentions the split in his book *Old Diary Leaves*. He devotes a chapter on Dayananda Saraswati to describe the points of difference between the Arya Samaj and Theosophy.

In Hindu monastic orders, although there is no compulsory, systematic theological and philosophical training lasting for several years, there are individual monks who, through self-education and studies, have mastered their subjects and have taken pains to study other religions as well. After Swami Vivekananda, some outstanding monks like Swami Abhedananda, Nirvedananda, Brahmananda, Nikhilananda of New York, Kailānanda of Madras, Swami Nityaswarupananda of the Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Calcutta, Swami Madhavananda, the late President of the Ramakrishna Mission in Belur Math, and a number of others have kept up that glorious tradition of making an objective study of religions other than theirs, not with a view to fighting them, but for enriching their own souls and culture with more light from the other side of the curtain. I have personally known most of the outstanding monks of the Ramakrishna Mission.

The frog-in-the-well psychology is by no means restricted to this or that religious organisation. It is a common disease in all monastic institutions in which the founder, or the superiors or individual monks have not made an honest attempt to break open the raised walls of their own wells and enter the vast ocean of varieties of religious experiences

outside. Although theoretically Hinduism is broad-based and the most tolerant religion in the world, practically, however, its monastic and social institutions are too rigid, narrow, sectarian and intolerant. If the Catholic monastic institutions are accused of narrow dogmatism and bigotry, then all the non-Catholic monastic institutions are found to be still narrower, and more bigoted when you study them from their inner sanctuaries. Or perhaps, it is better to express that idea in a different way by saying: Catholic Christianity is more tolerant, receptive and assimilative than the most tolerant, receptive and assimilative religion or monastic order in the world. And yet, both these two leviathans, Christianity and the Hindu-Buddhist world, cannot be drawn out with a hook, and they have to learn from each other, live together, integrating each other.

Like Aquinas is authoritative in Catholic monasteries, so is Shankara in orthodox Hindu ashrams. Besides the scriptures, the Hindu monks study the Yoga system of Patanjali, the Upanishads, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, and other ancient Sanskrit classics in their original. But those who know good Sanskrit are few among the Hindu monks, much fewer than the number of monks who know Latin in Catholic Christianity, Greek or Hebrew among the Protestants.

In Buddhism there is more systematic study of their religion in monasteries than in Hindu *maths*. But the studies pursued in Buddhist monasteries lack that thoroughness, methodology and systematic exposition as we find in some Mahayana monasteries of China, and in the Catholic intellectual orders like the Jesuits and the Dominicans.

The Theravada monks study the Dhammapada and many of them learn it by heart as thoroughly and diligently as the Dominicans study by heart

the questions and articles in the *Summa Theologiae* of St Thomas Aquinas. Much time is spent in repetition of prayers and ceremonial religion in many Buddhist monasteries. The liturgical life is equally important as meditation and study in Mahayana Buddhist monasteries as in Catholic Cloisters. Study and learning, art and literature have found their repository in monasteries. In the Middle Ages it was the monasteries, specially the Benedictines and the Mendicant Orders of Europe, that preserved ancient manuscripts and works of art, when vandals and barbarians destroyed monuments of civilisation in Europe. They preserved not only religious manuscripts like the *Codex Sinaiticus* and *Codex Vaticanus* and the Septuagint version of the Bible but they also preserved ancient Greek classics, the works of Homer, Plato and Aristotle, the Roman classics like Cicero, Livy, Ovid, Seneca and Virgil. Similarly, in Buddhist monasteries and Hindu maths were preserved the philosophical works of Nagarjuna, Aswaghosa, Buddhaghosa, Ramanuja and other great luminaries of the Hindu-Buddhist world. The Tibetan monasteries preserved their entire canon which consist of 108 volumes of sacred texts, and 225 volumes of commentaries. Padma Sambhava, Milera, Tsong-Ka-Pa are among the great names in Tibetan monasteries.

But, in most Buddhist monasteries, their studies do not go beyond the broad-based Mahayana Buddhism with Hindu tantric and mystic traditions incorporated in it. As the lamas gained spiritual and political power in the country, Buddhism became a closed patrimonial property for them, refusing foreign visitors, scholars and missionaries to go to Tibet and study in their monasteries. Guiseppe Tucci, an Italian orientalist, has narrated to me his personal experience in Buddhist monasteries. I knew Gipseseppe Tucci in Italy when I was a student in Rome and our friendship and exchange of

experiences continue till today. He got himself initiated in Buddhism both out of his inner urge to drink deep from *Dharma*, and as a diplomatic manoeuvre to gain entrance into the *sancta sanctorum* of Lamaist Tibet which he visited several times.

Giuseppe Tucci lived in Shantiniketan with Rabindranath Tagore for long months with a view to studying Sanskrit literature under the guidance of the poetic seer, at his *Viswa-Bharati*. In Rome, Tucci and the late Senator Giovanni Gentile founded the Oriental Institute for the Middle and Far East. At the invitation of the late Senator Gentile and Tucci I had often visited and studied at the ISMEO Institute in Via Merulana, Rome. Both Tucci and professor Giovanni Gentile were then critical of Christian civilisation and Christian churches and very much enthusiastic of oriental philosophy. They found in me a kindred spirit because of my nationalist urge, and love of oriental wisdom even in my student days in Rome.

Much water has flowed underneath the bridge since then. My friend Giovanni Gentile, who was the first Education Minister in Mussolini's Cabinet in 1922, and the General Editor of the Italian Encyclopedia, was shot dead in Florence in 1943 by anti-Fascist soldiers. Giuseppe Tucci had enough time to see the East and the West in their true colours. The last time when I met Prof. Tucci in Bombay in 1954, he told me:

"Well, in the past I have been most critical and hostile to Christianity. But now I begin to understand where Christianity scores. I am no more hostile to Christianity and begin to appreciate positive contributions of Christianity. But still, I feel more at home in your Hindu India and Buddhist East. I live in Europe only for my work."

Well, I replied to Prof. Tucci:

"I have also now seen both the worlds. I have been a Catholic monk for about a decade and I made love with

the Hindu-Buddhist monastic ideals for about the same time. Now I know what is worthwhile in both. I began as a Catholic monk. Then my race consciousness woke up and I was fondled in the loving arms of Mother India, her culture, her traditions, and Buddhism, the world-conquering daughter of India. Priests then accused me of adultery, for having neglected my Dominican Order and living in love with the Ramakrishna Mission Order of monks, with the Mahabhoji Society of India, with the Arya Samajists, the Theosophists, etc. But now, I am in my latter thirties. There is a sense of realism and objectivity dawning upon me. I am drawn again to my old Mother, my Catholic Church, to the ideals of the Dominican Order, my first Lady Love. At the same time, I am equally loyal to what is perennial and immortal in the Hindu-Buddhist world. The rest of my life I want to devote to marrying Christianity with the Hindu-Buddhist world, the Christian West with the Hindu-Buddhist East, for I am a child of both, a lover of both."

What is needed in great monasteries is an objective study of other religions with a view to enriching one's spiritual life. Reason alone is the common basis for us all; not authority of any scripture or prophet. Reason in its totality is not merely reasoning and logic, it is mysticism in intuitive philosophy as well. Christians have to study the Hindu-Buddhist lore as their own, because the human family is one. The Hindu-Buddhist monks should study christian classics and culture as their own, because christian West is just another member of the same one human family. What is heresy from one point of view, will be the bread of life from the heretic's point of view. Only sanctity, purity spiritual perfection and Self-realisation should be the supreme criterion to accept or reject theories from a practical point of view. To err is human. All humans are frail. Truth alone can claim infallibility. Through sympathetic studies we can build a bridge between Christianity and the Hindu-Buddhist world. There is no religion higher than truth: *Satyahat nasti paro Dharma.*

CHAPTER XV

HERMITAGES

"Make thyself an island which no flood can engulf."

—*Buddha*

"In this wide world, I stand alone."

—*Buddha*

"Far in a wild, unknown to the public view,
From youth to age a reverend hermit grew;
The moss his bed, the cave his humble cell,
His food the fruits, his drink the crystal well.
Remote from men, with God he pass'd his days;
Prayer all his business—all his pleasure praise."

—*Parnell*

Monastic ideal, as was mentioned earlier, takes individualistic form or community shape. In either case, it means withdrawal from worldly entanglements. But a hermit lives in constant communion with God or Truth-Beauty-Love, while a religious monk shares his divine life with the fellow members of his religious community.

In community life there is the social nature of man finding fulfilment, while in eremitic form of monasticism only man's divine nature finds fulfilment to the exclusion of his social, civic and political nature. Since contemplation of Truth is higher than any form of active apostolate, it follows hermitage is far superior to coenobitic life and hermits stand on a plane higher than monks.

The word hermit comes from the Greek word *eremia*, which means desert. Historically and etymologically, hermits were once cave dwellers in the deserts. The early Christian hermits like St Anthony and St Paul were hermits of the desert.

All along Western India, in Central India, at

Nalanda, at Vikramshila, Ajanta Caves, at the Elephanta Caves and elsewhere there are hundreds of caves hewn out of rock which were once the dwelling places of Buddhist hermits who led both their individual and community life. Kanheri Caves are only some fifteen miles north of Bombay City. There are well over one hundred Buddhist caves there with a huge *Chaitya Vihara* or assembly hall for monks, all carved out from rocky hills.

In Ceylon there are flourishing forest hermitages for study and meditation at Madakada, Mihiritala, Kalgula and elsewhere. The historic forest hermitage at Dinibillagala was destroyed by King Rajasingh 400 years ago.

Then in Indian tradition there are a number of historical sites in the Himalayan jungles which once used to be the hermitages of Hindu *rishis*, ascetics and mystic seers who lived in the forest cave all alone, in constant communion with God, who led an austere life over the years with a view to attaining superhuman powers. School children in India are familiar with the description given in epics about the Valmiki hermitage. Artists have transmitted the ancient tradition that Valmiki, the reputed author of *Ramayana*, lived in austerity and meditation, alone, all alone with his scrolls and writing materials with him. Lions and tigers and wild beasts roamed about in his jungle hermitage like sheep and cats, all tamed and controlled by the spiritual powers attained by yogi Valmiki. To Indians the Himalayas are thrice sacred because of the eremitical traditions associated with the mythology of god Shiva and Parvati, with the Upanishadic seers who received enlightenment in hermitages that arose in the solemn silence of the mighty Himalayas.

Many great Indians, from time to time, go up to some hill station or pilgrimage spot or jungles in the Himalayas for meditation, silence and soli-

tude. In modern times, Swami Vivekananda roamed about up in the Himalayas, founded a monastery at Almora, deep in the heart of the Himalayas. Debendranath Tagore, the father of Poet Rabindranath Tagore, enjoyed his vision and divine ecstasy up in the Himalayas. A simple hut, a cave, a silent spot, a rented house, a monastery, an *ashram*, a real hermitage, anything is good in the Himalayas for meditative minds to soar higher and higher in exploring divine mysteries and reaching the summits of spiritual perfection. If the Ganges is the river sacred to the Hindus, then the Himalayas are the sacred mountains of Indians, because of the longstanding eremitic traditions in eastern monasticism.

I have myself visited the Himalayas some thirteen times. Here and there you can still see small huts where you will come across an enlightened ✓ soul, living in isolation, in deep thought and meditation, in contemplative ecstasy, ready to help you with his advice and prayers. Helena Petrovna Blavatsky in her *Secret Doctrine*, makes mention of the *Mahatmas*, or highly mystical hermits, she came across in Tibet, who helped her to understand the esoteric of spiritual life, the *Secret Doctrine* of Theosophy.

Monasticism, being but one urge and one vocation, has, however, its individualistic, social and community expressions. Individualistic monasticism produces hermits, while collective, social and communal monasticism produces monks and nuns. The technical term for community life of monks is called coenobitism, which is derived from two Greek words, viz., *Koinos*, which means common, and *Bios*, or life. That a certain monk chooses eremitical life, and another chooses coenobitic life, depends entirely on individual temperament, experiences and the mission one has in life. Although contemplative life of a hermit is *per se* su-

perior to active and apostolic life of many modern religious congregations, the consensus of opinion among masters of spiritual life supports the view that a mixed life of contemplation and action, of eremitic isolation and social action is the best ideal suited to human beings.

Buddha, Christ and minor lights under them, all adopted a life of contemplation and action, periodic withdrawal into their own hermitages in an isolated desert or mountain in order to meditate and pray, and then returned to social dynamics in society for the welfare of people.

One of the outstanding patterns of eremitic Hindu monasticism was seen at Pondicherry Ashram, where the great Sri Aurobindo retired after his revolutionary politics. He fled to French Pondicherry in order to escape British wrath in British India where Aurobindo once took part in terrorist activities in order to win Indian independence from the British. Yet, it was not political expediency or frustration that led him to Pondicherry, but his inner urge to devote the rest of his life in contemplative meditation and silent Self-realisation. Sri Aurobindo believed in the ideal of Superman, not in the sense Friedrich Nietzsche understood it, but in the Vedantic sense, in the potential divinity innate in man, which could be unfolded through a process of yogic and psychic discipline. By his very presence, his thoughts, Sri Aurobindo believed, he could influence the world for the better, far more effectively than through action in the field. For God to be is to act; supermen who approach God also participate of that quality of God, identifying being with acting. It was around that silent personality of hermit Aurobindo the entire Pondicherry Ashram movement sprang up quite naturally and which is now developed and piloted so ably by the Mother, The *Shakti* of the *Maha Purusha*.
Aurobindo.

Four times a year Sri Aurobindo used to give silent audience to visitors. His look, his face, his Self-realised eyes were powerful messages more eloquent than oratory and reasoning. Behind the silent seer, the *rishi*, the hermit Aurobindo, stood the Mother, who became the eloquent channel and link between the Master and his disciples. So grew up that Ashram with over one thousand inmates with a new system of education, physical training, marriage system and social values and ideals of their own, everything flowing from the overflow of the Self-realised power of hermit Aurobindo.

Gandhiji's Sabarmati and Sevagram Ashrams were also essentially hermitages for silent workers who, nourished through the divine power of meditation and prayer, would also act in society in bettering the moral, economic and political lot of their fellow countrymen. Both in Pondicherry Ashram and Gandhiji's two ashrams at Sabarmati and Wardha, it was the silent eremitic and yogic aspect that appealed to me much more than the external activities and movements that emanated from that divine power-house. The Gandhi cottage at Wardha is a small mud hut where that frail, thin, seminaked fakir lived and worked. Yet, what a great power emanated from that mud hermitage! From that frail man, that modern Socrates, that Indian Abraham Lincoln, brown John Kennedy, that Gujarati Tolstoy, all rolled into one!

Sevagram was started as a hermitage, an ashram. It is said that when Debendranath went to Bholpur and sat under a tree, he experienced great peace within. Then he named that rural spot *Shanti-Niketan* which means "abode of peace". Shantiniketan started with meditation, with the *Sadhana* or spiritual discipline of Debendranath Tagore, which became famous through the educational and humanistic activities of the late Poet Rabindranath Tagore.

Similar is the history of many educational institutions in India, all starting with a silent hermitage of a seer, which finds expression in various educational, social and political activities. The forest universities of Indian history, the great Buddhist Nalanda and Vikramshila universities, sprang up as the outward expression of intense *sadhana* or meditation of a hermit living in his hermitage. In these days, Swami Shivananda tried to revive this old Indian tradition by actually starting a "Forest University" at Rishikesh in the heart of the Himalayas.

The ancient Hindu hermits were called *Manis* or *Rishis* who sat in silence for months and years, ate nothing but fruits and roots. They did penance or *tapas* which etymologically means heat, heat of intense mental and spiritual activity for the expiation of sins and acquisition of virtues. In Indian literature, notably in *Shakuntala*, *Mahabharata* and *Harishchharita* and other Indian classics, we get vivid descriptions of ideal hermitages and hermits living therein. The story is told of hermit Vishwamitra, who after years of penance, rose higher than gods in asceticism and merit. He could be defeated by gods only by sending Menca, a celestial nymph, an *Apsara*, who tempted the hermit and made him break his vow of continence and thus made him fall. These kinds of temptations against chastity, poverty by offering sexual pleasures and wealth are narrated in the life of Buddha himself and in the lives of many Bodhisatvas, monks and hermits. Parallel stories and legends are found in Christianity as well.

Coenobitic life, for certain psychological types, becomes quite unbearable. There have been many cases of monks living in communities who, after being sore, sick and weighed down by the routine habits of a community life, have sought asylum in hermitages, either in organised hermitages like

the Hermits of St Augustine, the Trappists and the Carthusians, or essentially individualistic and free hermitages where one could be left in peace to lead one's own life. Monks or priests who have had great disappointments and disillusionments with religion and politics, usually find their life happy by withdrawing themselves to hermitages of their own making or liking. This is what one sees in the life of priests like Alfred Loisy, the Catholic modernist of France, who, being silenced and fought against, withdrew to a farm in France and there spent his evening sunshine of life in intense communion with Nature and God.

Speaking from my own experience, I feel I am the happiest when I am left alone. I am really myself when I am back from duties to my hermitage. We are really at our best when we are alone with Self, God. We are less ourselves when we are with another person. We are lost in a crowd. Duties will oblige us to move about here and there, associate with this group or that, this political party or that, but in order to attain peace and joy, we must come back to our own Self. St Augustine had a favourite saying: "Soul, my soul, do not go outside, enter within thy self! For Truth abides in the interior of the soul of man". Hermitage is self-abidance and God-communion of a retired soul, usually after conversion from sensual vanities to godliness, from disillusionments to spiritual realism and seriousness of life.

I have had my own share in many a disillusionment in life. With all forms of organised religions I had once quarrelled, fighting against priestcraft, image-worship, rites and ceremonies in Hinduism, Catholicism, Lamaism, etc. Dr Sarvapalli Radhakrishnan, in his Foreword to my book on Rabindranath Tagore (The Poet of Hindustan—Orient Book Co., Calcutta, 1948) wrote: "The author does

not feel at home in any of the organised religions, although he is aware of the essential need of religion". This was true twenty years ago, and not quite untrue even today. At every major step in my religious pilgrimage I had received but kicks and blows from some of my superiors on the charge of heresy and making love with Indian culture. Ecclesiastical censure, in its practical working, reduces one to absolute impotence, and the nightmare still haunts one with a sense of mental paralysis and seeing ghosts of ecclesiastical police force. If I do not write, I will starve; if I write, the police and the C.I.D. in religion will brand me, censure me and penalise me. Yet, the apostolate of the pen is not merely a means of livelihood like tent-weaving was to St Paul; it is the essence of my Dominican vocation. We have to launch out into the deep, and leave God and men of good sense to arrive at their own judgements.

If I had disillusionments with my own Mother Church, greater was the disillusionment and frustration I experienced in Hinduism, Buddhism and other religions which are mine by blood, race and spiritual affinity. If I had my final swing back to Catholicism, it was not because I found the ideal therein, but because the Catholic Church, specially in its mystic, esoteric and monastic life, is still the nearest possible approximation to the ideal of the Kingdom of God on earth. From other religions I received no blows; but often unmerited praise and kindness. Yet, from close acquaintance, I know no other historical religion can satisfy the hunger and thirst of my soul as the Church Catholic. Hers is a more perfect discipline, more thorough training, more really concerned in the salvation of souls, more practical in her hierarchy and sacramental system, more consonant to the vital urge of the human heart, more in unison with our heart-beat. Taking my anchorage in the See of St Peter,

I still continue to be in the arms of Hinduism, Buddhism, Sufism, Jainism and the mystic aspects of other religious sects, because I know I am part of them all, because I am a Catholic, beyond the confines of East and West, transcending the Christian confines of Rome, Canterbury or Athens.

But my greatest disillusionment and frustration came on the political front. As a young, enthusiastic nationalist, in my twenties, I took part in Indian independence movement, first from a distance through sympathies, then with the *India League* of Mr V.K. Krishna Menon and the British leftist political parties, like the I.L.P. and C.P.I., then as a journalist in London, and then taking active part in India. When I first met Gandhiji I told him: "I have disentangled myself from all ties with all organisations so that I may throw my lot with Free India". Freedom came on 15th August, 1947. On 30th January, 1948, five months later, Gandhiji was martyred in Delhi. Long before the bullets of Naram Godse pierced his chest, the misdeeds of the Congressmen had already wounded the heart of Gandhi in such a way that he prayed God to release him from the prison-house of his mortal frame, instead of living impotent to check the rampant evils in the country. Dr Radhakrishnan expressed this view before he accepted the job as the President of India at the Central Government.

My three Hindustan series of books, *The Hero*, *The Poet* and *Our India*, were published by Sri Pahlad Kumar Pramanik of the Orient Book Co. of Calcutta when I was still an optimist in politics. From 1948 onwards, I have seen misery in India, the refugee position, hunger, starvation and injustice. I saw the erstwhile idealists climbing the ladder of political career mainly with the desire to bask under the sunshine. Many took the name of Gandhiji and the Congress only for self-aggrandisement, while to the hermit of Wardha, the *Mahatma*,

Independence should mean nothing but the triumph of religious values, *Dharma*. The Gandhian dream of *Ram Rajya* was soon receding to the background and *Ravana Rajya* was looming before my eyes. In the Indian tradition, Ram is God-incarnate, while Ravana is Satan-incarnate. Some trace of Gandhian idealism could still be traced even now in 1969; but we have been a colossal failure in our economic, social, educational and political fronts. The money that has been squandered by the Congress government could have been enough to guarantee the health, education, food, clothing and shelter to India's millions. Mammon triumphs, and God is being crucified in India, as in many other power-mad countries of Christian West.

Every year that passed by left an indelible mark of frustration in me. Because I had entertained highest hopes in post-independent India, the toxin of frustration became the more virulent as I began to study Indian political scenes since Independence. The snail-pace progress and the much advertised Five Year Plans are totally inadequate to face and solve the major problems of this country. Communalism, linguism, provincialism, etc. tend to balkanise India, already vivisectioned into Pakistan by the British, joining hands with the communalists, before they left the Indian Empire, then consisting of Burma, undivided India up to the protectorate of Aden.

This is not the place to expatiate on Indian political scenes. Suffice it to say that it was the Indian political scene since Independence and the international situation after the last war that made me to reconsider the claims of religions and find some fulfilment and satisfaction in religious ideals. If disillusionment in politics led me back to the lap of religion, then comparative defects and frustration in Hinduism, Buddhism and other religions of my own country, made me to reevaluate the position of

Catholic Christianity in the light of my own experiences. It is this sober re-evaluation of religion in general, and of Catholicism vis-a-vis the Hindu-Buddhist world that flung me back to my old Mother and my first love, my Church Catholic, whose loving, humble and obedient child I strive to be. Far above Reason and Logic it is the Divine Grace that effects conversions and re-conversions, from the desert of nationalism to the pastoral land of internationalism, from the wilderness of empirical rationalism to the oasis of religious mysticism and perennial philosophy of an, the Catholic.

Yet, when the circle is complete, the return to the same point is not just the same as the starting point. In our spiritual journey we start off as children when hills are hills, husbands are husbands, homes are homes and stars are stars. In our youthful adolescent stage the hills are no more hills, the stars are no more stars, homes are no more homes. In our final stage, we are back again to the second childhood, re-born of God, and then hills are again hills, homes are again homes. In this stage there is life-wisdom to enlighten us, and the realism of spiritual maturity is illumined with the idealistic torch of the Absolute, of God, all seen *sub specie aeternitatis*. So, now to me my mother Church is again my mother Church, seven Sacraments are again the seven Sacraments—seven, neither one less nor one more—Christ is the incarnation of Logos, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, and Mary is the Mother of God, *Theotokos*; Peter is the rock against which “the gates of hell shall not prevail”, and all other teachings and tenets of orthodox Catholicism exactly as the Church teaches, as Aquinas expounds, coloured, however, by the background of my own personal experience.

It is retirement into an isolated hermitage that has given me time, leisure and disposition to investigate into the deeper nature of things, far deeper

than politics, cut-throat economics and superficial religions. Speaking from my own experience, I will prescribe as a tonic for all victims of frustration and neuroses a secluded life of hermit, living for a time alone with God and Self. My own vocational urge and past habits take me again and again into the vortex of activities. But I can do that only when I have my anchorage firmly fixed in an isolated Dominican cell, a hermitage, the like of which for the last seventeen years I have in Bandra, the jungly outhouse of the Retreat House, where my past wounds are being healed up, and fresh weapons manufactured to wage the battles of the Lord in this militant church of God.

In hermitages, however, there are drawbacks too: Firstly, one can become a rascal and a devil in a hermitage, if one does not live disciplined and vigilant. As Aristotle said: "A solitary man is either an angel or a devil". Some Hindu hermits are like pure souls. At Vajreshwari, I knew Swami Nityanand, who is chaste like an angel. His life attracted thousands like flowers attract bees. In Hinduism, where monasticism is very largely eremitic and solitary and individualistic, this danger is most obvious than anywhere else. Some of these Hindu hermits, known as *sadhus*, *yatis*, *brahmacharins* and *sanyasins*, are found to be rogues. They cheat people, playing on their religious idealism, and earn money and indulge in most abominable vices. But then, even in coenobitic monasticism, individual monks can degrade themselves and bring ill-repute to themselves and their religious society, though to a much lesser extent.

Secondly, hermits lose contact with harder realities of life, as they have escaped from the painful associations and strangling grip of economic struggles of the common man. That is why the great monumental works of some hermits like the *Life*

Divine, unlike the teachings of Buddha, Plato and Jesus, has little message for the common man.

Thirdly, hermits lack fellowship and communion of saints and exchange of vital experiences which can spring only from community living. This is a drawback for one who is engaged in active ministry.

Individual hermits and community monks lapse into vices when they lose sight of the goal of religious vocation and lead a comfortable life with enough money and means at their disposal. The suppression of monasteries in England in the time of Henry the VIII was both due to the arrogance of the first "Defender of Faith", and also due to abuses that crept in monasteries, then rolling in wealth, ease and comfort. In China, in the years from 1830 to 1840 many monasteries of the Buddhists and Taoists were suppressed for alleged immoralities inside cloisters. The Chinese being a pragmatic and positivistic people, monasticism should stand on its own merits, even when the state extends its official support to both coenobites and hermits of Buddhism and Taoism.

As both history and experience teach us, the most perfect and successful monasticism in the world is that type which has eremitic isolation, and contemplative meditation as its core, and coenobitic and community living as outlets for its social dynamism which is essential for the uplift and spiritual regeneration of mankind, which is the goal and *raison d'être* of monasticism in every religion, in every place, for all time.

CHAPTER XVI

MONASTIC GOAL—BUDDHIST NIRVANA

"Having been myself subject to the contingency of birth and experienced its unpleasantness, I sought for *Nirvana* which is without such contingency—which is unsurpassed and secure from all worldly yoke, and obtained it. The knowledge with the vision arose: 'Sure is my final emancipation, this is the last birth, there is no longer the possibility of rebirth'."

—*Buddha, Majjihima I, p. 167 or Chula-Malunkya Sutta*

"The Blessed One replied: 'The term *Nirvana*, is used with different meanings, by different people...*Nirvana* is the realm of Dharmata-Buddha; it is where the manifestation of Noble Wisdom that is Buddhahood expresses itself in Perfect Love for all; it is where the manifestation of Perfect Love that is Tathgatahood expresses itself in Noble Wisdom for the enlightenment of all—there indeed is *Nirvana*.'"

—*Lankavatara Sutra*

Although religious urge is implanted in Nature, its manifestation begins with personal experience of facts of life. Religion springs out of sheer necessity in our life, out of a sense of helplessness, futility and misery which is the lot of the children of Adam and Eve. No serious mind, no conscientious man, for long will sit idle without seeking and finding out for himself the why, whence and whither of man's life on this planet. Religion is the answer to these deeper queries within the heart of man, about his whence and whither, his destiny and deliverance.

The goal of religious life is just one and the same for all men, for the whole of mankind. The approaches to Reality and avenues to emancipation may be differently worded and viewed; but

the substance of that goal in religion cannot be but one for all mankind. Christians are wont to call it redemption, salvation, beatific vision, union with God, etc. The Hindus call it *mukti*, *moksha*, Eman-cipation, *Kaivalya*, attainment of Brahman, etc. The Buddhists call it *Nirvana*, extinction of the flames of relative existence and entry into the Unconditioned Reality.

For what purpose does well over a quarter of mankind profess Buddhism? What prompts about one third of today's Tibetan population to become monks, vowed down to chastity, individual poverty and obedience to the monastic rules, observe the *patimokha* rules and obey their abbots and superiors? Although theoretically a lama may marry, not many lamas marry, as most of them marry the Buddhist ideal of perfection. A few lamas who do marry, keep up a sort of Platonic love between the married couples. One such outstanding example is Lama Govind, a German Buddhist married to a Parsee and living in India. I know the Govinds personally, and I can say that Platonic love is not merely a theory, but a vital factor in their life, as it is indeed in the companionship-marriage of idealist couples, who, for one reason or other, find their life fuller in companionship rather than in solitary sailing on life's turbulent main.

Nowhere in the world has monasticism flourished in such a luxuriant way as in Tibet. Ranging from crudest animism, ancestor worship and gorgeous rituals and ceremonial religion, one can climb up to the most subtle esoteric wisdom in Tibetan monasteries. This vast tableland with hardly four million inhabitants, with the Dalai Lama as the Pope-King of the country, is of absorbing interest to students and savants of esoteric wisdom. Western orientalists are getting more enamoured of the monastic romance of Tibet and Buddhist countries than the local people themselves. Dist-

Still more nutragious to the spirit of Buddhism is the idea that is entertained even by well-meaning scholars that Buddhism is a pessimistic religion. These superficial caricatures of Buddhism are as baseless as to say that Roman Catholicism is merely ritualism and dogmatism, popery and priestcraft. If you scratch a little deeper you will see that Nirvana is not extinction, nor Buddhism is pessimism par excellence.

The positive, super-optimistic and cheerful message of Nirvana is that man, through attainment of the superconscious state, cuts the knots of conditioned and relative world of phenomena and enters the sanctuary of the Ineffable, the Absolute, the Real. The famous Tibetan aphorism which expresses the bliss of Nirvana, which is recited on their rosaries thousands of times every day by Lamas, Bonzes and Bhikkhus, says: '*Om Mani Padme Om*'. Literally it means: Om, the Pearl is in the Lotus, Om. Om, is the Hindu symbol for *Nirguna Brahman*—The Impersonal Absolute Reality. *Mani* means pearl. *Padma* is the Sanskrit word for lotus, which is the most comprehensive symbol of perfect, pure and Self-realised life in both Hinduism and Buddhism. Etymologically, then, this Nirvanic sutra means, the Pearl is in the Lotus, Hail, Om. Esoterically and mystically, it means the Buddhist doctrine of Nirvana in the Lotus. In Pali Canon, Buddha is a historical person, appearing in Time and Space, seeking and struggling for *Bodhi* or Enlightenment. But, mystically, Buddha in the Lotus, is eternal, the Divine, God who appears in human form for the salvation of mankind. This is very much akin to Pauline Christology of the Logos "emptying Himself out and taking the form of a servant". Unlike in Christianity, Buddhism asserts that what Buddha became, that every man can. This brave idea that a man is potentially Buddha, Krishna or Ram does not savour blasphemy or

heresy in the Hindu-Buddhist world. But in orthodox Christianity even to say that one can reach the degree of Christhood is heresy, blasphemy and sin! Ideologically, the Hindu-Buddhist world is the bravest in history, as in social revolution Christianity is the pioneer in history.

Nirvana "is the extinction of passion, of aversion, of confusion", in an ethical sense. The disease of the soul is cured, the psychic toxins are removed from the system through treading the path of Nirvana. And yet, mere conquest of passions and emotions based on our separate existence is only a pointer, not the pinnacle of Nirvana, which, in the words of Christmas Humphreys, is "the end of separation, the return to the One, to **THAT**" (Buddhism, P. 203).

What one observes in Buddhist monasteries is not Nirvana, but steps to Nirvana which lies outside the realm of phenomena and conditioned existence of Time and Space, beyond the great veil of *Maya*, Nirvana is within the range of experience, but it always lies beyond observation, expression. Nirvana is ineffable, undescribable, but it should be experienced in the state of Nirvana in this world, and in *Parinirvana* or beyond Nirvana, after one has left the mortal body in and around which the Self is encased, imprisoned.

While surveying the paths leading up to Buddhist Nirvana, which is better seen, sought and studied in monasteries than in the life of householders, we have to distinguish the doctrinal and the ethical discipline of monks. Dogmas and Morals, speculative philosophy and ethical discipline are essential for humans to tread the path of religion. All religions have their dogmatic theology or speculative philosophy, and their Ten Commandments and Panch Silas, or the moral, ethical and spiritual discipline to enable the votaries and adepts to climb higher the path of perfection.

ance lends enchantment to the view. For a similar reason, Eastern scholars, unless of nationalist temperament, look to Greek culture, Roman Law and Christian civilisation with greater enthusiasm and awe than the people of the West themselves. Not only distance lends enchantment to the view, it throws a kind of glamour around it. I have seen many Europeans, specially the French, sun-basking and anointing their body in order to make their skin brown. In India, I have seen many through powdering and washing and lotions trying to make their skin white. In religion too, as also in culture and creations of human spirit, I think there is a subconscious imitation and emulation of things which we do not have.

This psychological fact apart, there is that hard core of Buddhist civilisation and culture which stands out as the permanent legacy of Buddhism to the world at large. Behind the skin-deep appearances of a religion, its popular devotions and practices, there stands firm its soul-deep esoteric which gives it its permanent value. These imponderable values in religious culture and civilisation are to be sought in its philosophy and theology much more than in its ritualism, ceremonialism, hierarchy, sacramentalism and symbolism.

In order to understand the craving of the Buddhist world in general, and of Buddhist monks and nuns in particular, towards the attainment of Nirvana, we have to dwell for a while on its doctrinal tenets, its philosophy of practical living. It is philosophy or life-wisdom that is the foundation of any religious civilisation. Theology, Faith, Supernaturalism, etc., are all based on philosophy, which is the common denominator and common basis for all religions and people to meet as on an unshaken rock. Theologies divide, philosophies unite. If philosophies divide, then Philosophy underlying all philosophical systems should unite us. Then

that Religion underlying all religions will become a source of union and fellowship between different peoples. Humanity will be welded and cemented on that basis, Philosophy, Reason, Nature and the Transcendent Supernatural.

Max Muller, speaking of comparative philosophy said: "He who knows but one language knows none". This is truer in religion. He who knows but one religion, knows none. The Christian world, I believe, should see for themselves and study the Hindu-Buddhist world, not as a critic, not as an apologist, but as a member of the same human family, as their own. Similarly, the Hindu-Buddhist world should study Christianity with the same open mind, not with nationalist pride and superiority complex, but as fellow-seekers and fellow-sharers of Divine Light and Love. The old missionary apologetics based on the authority of prophets and scriptures is dead beyond hope of resurrection. But the new approach to consider mankind as God's one family, revelations as different approaches to Reality, religions as different pathways towards Self-realisation, has a future. The *Vedas*, the *Tripitakas*, the *Vendidad*s and the *Korans* are but different chapters in the universal revelation of Truth to mankind. It is in this spirit of give-and-take, learn-and-teach that we should study the goal of monasticism in Buddhism, Hinduism and Christianity in these concluding chapters. I strongly believe that religion, rightly experienced, should be a source of union and fellowship between peoples, not the cesspool of controversies and crusades and holy wars, anathemas and excommunications.

Nirvana, which is the goal of Buddhism, Buddhist philosophy and Buddhist monasticism, are often misconceived in a negative sense, as though Nirvana were just the extinction of individuality and personality, of the flames of passions and desires.

Still more outrageous to the spirit of Buddhism is the idea that is entertained even by well-meaning scholars that Buddhism is a pessimistic religion. These superficial caricatures of Buddhism are as baseless as to say that Roman Catholicism is merely ritualism and dogmatism, popery and priestcraft. If you scratch a little deeper you will see that Nirvana is not extinction, nor Buddhism is pessimism par excellence.

The positive, super-optimistic and cheerful message of Nirvana is that man, through attainment of the supereconscious state, cuts the knots of conditioned and relative world of phenomena and enters the sanctuary of the Ineffable, the Absolute, the Real. The famous Tibetan aphorism which expresses the bliss of Nirvana, which is recited on their rosaries thousands of times every day by Lamas, Bonzes and Bliikhus, says: '*Om Mani Padme Om*'. Literally it means: Om, the Pearl is in the Lotus, Om. Om, is the Hindu symbol for *Nirguna Brahman*—The Impersonal Absolute Reality. *Mani* means pearl. *Padma* is the Sanskrit word for lotus, which is the most comprehensive symbol of perfect, pure and Self-realised life in both Hinduism and Buddhism. Etymologically, then, this Nirvanic sutra means, the Pearl is in the Lotus, Hail, Om. Esoterically and mystically, it means the Buddhist doctrine of Nirvana in the Lotus. In Pali Canon, Buddha is a historical person, appearing in Time and Space, seeking and struggling for *Bodhi* or Enlightenment. But, mystically, Buddha in the Lotus, is eternal, the Divine, God who appears in human form for the salvation of mankind. This is very much akin to Pauline Christology of the Logos "emptying Himself out and taking the form of a servant". Unlike in Christianity, Buddhism asserts that what Buddha became, that every man can. This brave idea that a man is potentially Buddha, Krishna or Ram does not savour blasphemy or

heresy in the Hindu-Buddhist world. But in orthodox Christianity even to say that one can reach the degree of Christhood is heresy, blasphemy and sin! Ideologically, the Hindu-Buddhist world is the bravest in history, as in social revolution Christianity is the pioneer in history.

Nirvana "is the extinction of passion, of aversion, of confusion", in an ethical sense. The disease of the soul is cured, the psychic toxins are removed from the system through treading the path of Nirvana. And yet, mere conquest of passions and emotions based on our separate existence is only a pointer, not the pinnacle of Nirvana, which, in the words of Christmas Humphreys, is "the end of separation, the return to the One, to THAT" (Buddhism, P. 203).

What one observes in Buddhist monasteries is not Nirvana, but steps to Nirvana which lies outside the realm of phenomena and conditioned existence of Time and Space, beyond the great veil of *Maya*, Nirvana is within the range of experience, but it always lies beyond observation, expression. Nirvana is ineffable, undescribable, but it should be experienced in the state of Nirvana in this world, and in *Parinirvana* or beyond Nirvana, after one has left the mortal body in and around which the Self is encased, imprisoned.

While surveying the paths leading up to Buddhist Nirvana, which is better seen, sought and studied in monasteries than in the life of householders, we have to distinguish the doctrinal and the ethical discipline of monks. Dogmas and Morals, speculative philosophy and ethical discipline are essential for humans to tread the path of religion. All religions have their dogmatic theology or speculative philosophy, and their Ten Commandments and Panch Silas, or the moral, ethical and spiritual discipline to enable the votaries and adepts to climb higher the path of perfection.

The speculative philosophical basis of Nirvana could be condensed as follows:-

1. There is the world of phenomena and the world of Neumenon, of *Maya* and *Satya*, of Time-and-Space-bound transiency and Eternity-bound permanency. The whole of the cosmos is mere becoming; not Being, not the Thing-in-Itself. What is true of the solar systems and "eternal hills and mountains" is true of gods and men. All change—all are subject to decay and death. Flies may live for a few hours, men for a few years, mountains for millennia, the solar systems for aeons; but all, in the end, must perish, die after growing old. Disease, old age and death are universal. Misery is universal. *Sabe Sankara Dukha*—All compounded things, all beings of the five *skandas* or confection, are born of misery, live in misery and end in misery.

While the doctrine of impermanence of *anicca*, and misery or *dukha*, and unsubstantiality of soul or *anatta* is common to all branches of the Hinayana and Mahayana groups of Buddhism, what is not sufficiently stressed is the doctrine of permanence, blessedness and reality of the Absolute. If Buddhism had taught only the empirical philosophy of misery in the world of relativity, of appearances and phantoms and incessant flux in the time-space-bound world, it would be the most desperate philosophy, and the most pessimistic religion in world history. But Buddhism points out with greater enthusiasm to the path of escape from misery, from the tentacles of ephemeral existence on earth. This point is not sufficiently stressed, or it is explained away, by some scholars who study Buddhism outside its Indian context. Buddha says:

"There is, monks, an unborn, unoriginated, uncreated, un compounded and were it not, monks, for this unborn, unoriginated, uncreated, un compounded, no escape could be shown here for what is born, has become, is made, is compounded. But because there is, monks, an unborn,

unoriginated, uncreated, un compounded, therefore an escape can be shown for that is born, has become, is made, is compounded". —*Udana* VIII, 3

In spite of the obvious meaning of the above-quoted text in support of the Buddhist philosophy of the Uncreated and the Absolute, Oldenberg explained it away as though it were Brahminical projection of Eternal Brahman which has no meaning to Buddhists.

To us Indians, as it has been shown by great Indian authorities like Sarvapalli Radhakrishnan, Surendranath Das Gupta, Rabindranath Tagore, Swami Vivekananda, Mahatma Gandhi and others, Buddha is just part and parcel of India's cultural heritage. Buddhism, as it sprang pure from the heart of Buddha, as it is recorded in earliest Pali scriptures, accepted from its parent Hinduism the doctrine of *Karma*, *dukkha*, re-incarnation or cycle of births and deaths for individual souls until the wheel of metempsychosis is put an end to through redemptive gnosis, *Buddhi* and enlightened consciousness, by being re-absorbed into the life of Brahman, by entering the ineffable state of Nirvana. While accepting these and allied Indian tenets, Buddha rejected wholesale the authority of the Vedas and other scriptures, the social cancer of caste and outcaste systems, hereditary priesthood, personal God and a permanent individual soul, etc.

And yet, Buddha did not teach us anything about the Absolute Brahman, because it is beyond teaching and being taught. Brahman is Silence. So Buddha kept quiet when questioned about Brahman and God and future state of soul, all questions which did not "tend to edification", and for the removal of misery from life. Being the most practical among prophets and philosophers of all ages, Buddha stuck to his central teaching on Nirvana,

escape from misery and attainment of peace, serenity and bliss.

"As the vast ocean, O monks, is impregnated with one flavour, the flavour of salt, so also, my disciples, this law and discipline is impregnated with but one flavour, with the taste of Nirvana, deliverance." —*Chullavagga IX, 1,4*

Take care of your means, the end will then take care of itself. Heed along the path, the Middle Path, and then its goal, Nirvana in the Absolute, will take care of itself. You send the Sputnik into the outer space, and it will circle around the earth by the very law of motion of bodies which does not meet with resistance. Your effort is to prepare such rockets which can throw heavy planets far beyond the denser regions. Similarly in *Dharma*, our effort is to stop the evil and acquire all good dispositions which, by the very laws of Nature, will lead us to Blessedness. Nirvana is an all-comprehensive word for all states of blessedness and Self-unfoldment in a man who has walked along the Eightfold Path after the fullest realisation of the Four Aryan Truths. The former is the ethical or moral philosophy of Buddhism while the latter, commonly known as the Four Noble Truths, forms the speculative philosophy of Buddhism.

The first truth in Buddhist philosophy is an assertion, a solemn asseveration of the fact that all life, as we know it, is misery. Birth is misery, growing old is misery, disease is misery, death is misery, birth after death is misery, association with things we do not like is misery, separation from things which we like is misery. Then comes the universalisation on a philosophical basis: All compound things are misery. Both deductively and *a priori*, the Buddhist position is impregnable, unmatched anywhere except in the Christian concept of Original Sin, and the infection of man and his whole Nature

by the taint of sin. "The whole creation groaneth and travaileth," says St Paul.

The second Noble Truth is the statement that the root-cause of *dukha* or misery is craving, desire, *Tanha* in Pali and *Trishna* in Sanskrit. Buddha says:

"Verily it is this thirst or craving, causing the renewal of existence, accompanied by sensual delight, seeking 'satisfaction now here, now there—the craving for the gratification of passions, for continued existence in the worlds of sense."

There is the famous Fire Sermon of Buddha in which he depicts our senses, their objects, our subjective reactions, all to be afire with craving, *tanha*, which is based on the illusion of individuality and separated self. Man imprisons himself within the fire house of his passions which prevents him from seeing Reality and launching into the blessedness of Self-realisation. Schopenhauer, one of the greatest westerners who was so profoundly influenced by Hindu-Buddhist thought, has said:

"Because the passion depended upon an illusion which represented that which has value only for the species as valuable for the individual, the deception must vanish after the attainment of the end of the species. The individual discovers that he has been the dupe of the species. If Petrarch's passion had been gratified, his song would have been silenced". —*The World as Will and Idea*, III, 370

No creative work, no Buddhas, Arhats and Bodhisatvas could ever emerge from ordinary men except by the power of Reality realised and seen within. Then only the *maya* veil could be rent asunder and man can enter the sanctuary of his Self. Each one can experience for himself how every indulgence of unregenerate desire, craving, shortens the life-span, throws the nervous system out of gear, engenders confusion of mind, dimming of the powerful ideas, weakening of will-power and loss of all creative dynamism and upsurge and refflore-

scence of all that is great and noble, immortal and divine in man.

Like an expert physician, Buddha enunciated the fact of disease, misery; its ethiology, desire or *tanha*, and the way to restore health and happiness to the patient, by the eradication of *Trishna* which could be effected by applying the prescription of the Eightfold Path which is meant to remove *Trishna*, or the white heat of sinful craving in man, and the subsequent landing of the pilgrim into the land of Nirvana.

2. The ethical discipline of the Eightfold Path is just the ladder to reach the summits of Nirvana. The Eightfold Path is the following:

(i) *Right Views*, which frees us from *avidya* or ignorance, from superstition, blind belief, and all forms of illusion and *Maya*.

(ii) *Right aspirations* and aims, which frees us from crookedness, duplicity and all forms of bad intentions and sinful purposes.

(iii) *Right speech* should be frank, sincere and truthful.

(iv) *Right conduct*, which must be pure, upright and virtuous.

(v) *Right means of livelihood*, which frees us from double-dealing, black-marketing, corruption, nepotism and black business.

(vi) *Right effort* in pursuing the path of Self-realisation constantly, perseveringly and incessantly.

(vii) *Right Meditation* with self-possession and an ever watchful mind.

(viii) *Right ecstasy or Rapture*, which is the crowning experience of blessedness for one who has lived the path of Buddhist ethics.

The peaceful, ever-blessed fortress of Nirvana can never be conquered but by one who, through

his own self-effort, has gone all the way along the Eightfold Path. Arhatship, the ideal of Bodhisatwa and a saint are all different stations along the path of Nirvana which, in its turn, is the ante-chamber to the highest transcendent Nirvana, known as *Parinirvana*.

The beneficial results that follow the treading of the Path is described by monks and read in the Buddhist scriptures. There is one passage in which, in the famous symbolism of Pure-wisdom of Buddha in lotus, we get a glimpse of the flowers and fruits and fragrance of a Buddhist Arhat, who has reached the shores of Nirvana. It reads:

"Just as a lotus flower of glorious, pure and high descent and origin is glossy, soft, desirable, sweet-smelling, longed-for, loved, and praised, untarnished by the water or the mud, crossed with tiny petals and filaments and pericarps, the resort of many bees, a child of the clear cold streams, just so is the disciple of the Noble Ones, endowed with thirty graces. What are these thirty (graces)?

1. His heart is full of affectionate, soft and tender love.
2. Evil is killed, destroyed, or cast out from him.
3. Pride is cast down.
4. Feeling of self-righteousness is put an end to.
5. Stable and strong, and established, and undying is his faith.
6. He enters into the enjoyment of the heart's refreshment, of the highly praised and desirable peace and bliss of the ecstasies of contemplation fully felt.
7. He exhales the most excellent and unequalled scented savour of righteousness of life.
8. Near is he and dear to gods and men alike.
9. Exalted by the best of beings, the Arhat Noble Ones themselves.
10. Gods and men delight to honour him.
11. The enlightened, wise and learned approve, esteem, appreciate and praise him.
- 12,13. Untarnished he remains by this world or the next.
14. He sees danger in the smallest offence.

15. Rich is he in the best of wealth, the wealth that is the fruit of the Path, the wealth of those who are ever seeking the highest of the attainments.
16. He is the partaker of the best of the four requisites of a recluse that may be obtained by asking.
17. He lives without a home, addicted to that best austerity which is dependent on the meditation of the *Jhanas*.
18. He has unravelled the whole net of evil.
- 19, 20. He has broken and burst through, doubled up, and utterly destroyed the possibility of rebirth in any of the five future states, and the five obstacles to the attainment of higher life in this world, viz. Lust, Malice, Sloth, Pride and Doubt.
- 21, 22, 23. Unalterable in character, excellent in conduct, he transgresses none of the rules as to the four requisites of a recluse.
24. He is set free from rebirths.
25. He has passed beyond all perplexity.
26. His mind is set upon complete emancipation.
27. He has seen the Truth, the sure and steadfast place of refuge from all fear has he gained.
28. The seven evil inclinations—to lust, and malice, and heresy, doubt and pride and desire for future life and ignorance—are rooted out from him.
29. He abounds in the bliss and ecstasies of contemplation.
30. He is endowed with all the virtues a recluse should have.
These, O King, are the thirty graces he is adorned withal".

The Buddhist *Theras* and *Bhikkhus* and *Lamas* are solicitous to explain to any inquirer in lengthy detail all the various aspects of *Dhamma*, in its doctrinal, ethical and realisational aspects. I still remember vividly the infinite patience and compassionate love with which Bhikshu Jagadish Kasyap, one of the foremost Indian Buddhist scholars, explained to me the "thirty-seven steps towards Arhatship".

Whenever I meet Tibetan, Japanese, Chinese and other Mahayana monks making pilgrimage

to India, I make it a point to discuss with them various aspects of Buddhist philosophy. Unfortunately, many of these monks are bookworms, or they may learn and repeat the *Dhammapada* by heart, and quote a few texts from the Buddhist scriptures. They are thoroughly ignorant of any other religion or philosophy other than their own. That is a terrible handicap for them to arrive at any new ideas as a result of discussions with them. They move in grooves and ruts and beaten tracks, much more firmly than the average Christian monk from the West.

What interested me most was to get a clear picture of the idea of Nirvana from both the *Theravada* and the *Mahayana* sources, not only from their well-known scriptural lore, but more from the experience of those monks and votaries who had dedicated their lives in monasteries for the investigation and realisation of that Truth that leads them up to the doors of Nirvana.

In December 1956, hundreds of Buddhist monks from all countries of Asia and outside thronged in India on the occasion of the 25th centenary celebrations of Buddha's *Maha Parinirvana*. The Dalai Lama and the Panchen Lama of Tibet also came to India. I had an occasion to meet them in Bombay. There was not much time for any serious and lengthy discussion. But that short talk we had and the public addresses of the young Dalai Lama and the discussion I had with a few Burmese, Ceylonese and Tibetan monks in the Buddha Centenary Year have all confirmed my conviction that, in spite of many faults and failures, those monks are still the best interpreters of the Buddhist way of life, even as the Catholic hierarchy, priest and nuns and monks are the best interpreters of historical Christianity, in spite of their faults and failings.

The very Buddhist monasteries exist for help-

ing the inmates to reach Nirvanic shores. Their pilgrimages—sometimes walking pilgrimages from Tibet and Burma to India!—their rosaries, studies, religious vows, are all aimed at the conquest of Nirvana. The very goal of Buddhist monasticism is Nirvana.

After we have just touched upon the Four Noble Truths and the Buddhist ethics of the Eightfold Path, we shall see the nature of Nirvana in Buddhism, that Nirvana which is the *Summum Bonum* of a religious Buddhist, the *raison d'être* of Buddhist monasticism.

3. The word Nirvana is derived from two Sanskrit roots, *Nir*, a negative particle which means without, and *Vana*, which means to go. It means therefore, "without going". In Hinduism there is constant going and coming of souls, caught up in the wheels of reincarnation and *samsara*. In Sanskrit, then, Nirvana means the ending of the cycle of going and coming of souls, of the wheel of *samsara*, the round of births and deaths. In the Pali language, the Buddhists call it as *Nibbana* or *Neibana* which means (ni – without and vanva – desire), without desire. Hence the root meaning is the state of being without desire or *thrisna*.

Philosophically, Nirvana means extinction of all causes of birth and death, of misery and impermanency. The simile is given of a lamp that dies out when the oil, feeding and sustaining the burning wick is extinguished. Similarly, when *karmic* forces are stopped, the wick of individual existence, with its births and deaths, also ends.

Bigandet narrates the story of a Buddhist monk from Burma with whom he was discussing about the nature of Nirvana. It was one evening, and the discussion on Nirvana took place in a small room where there was an oil lamp burning. As

the oil lamp on the writer's table died out for want of oil, the Buddhist monk exclaimed:

"Do not ask me any more what Neiban is; what has happened to the lamp just now tells you what Neiban is. That lamp is extinct because there is no more oil in the glass. A man is likewise in Neiban at the very moment that the principle or cause of existence is at an end, or entirely destroyed". —Bigandet, *Legend of the Burmese Buddha* p. 321

"Nirvana", a Nepalese Buddhist monk told me, "is the same as what you call immortality. When the cycle of births and deaths are destroyed, what remains behind is immortality, which can only happen when individual existence is put an end to, and one breathes with the breath of the Whole, lives in the life of Life itself." When sexuality and sensual thirsts end, the wheel of births and deaths stops, individuality is gone and we reach All—which is Nirvana".

In Buddhist scriptures, Nirvana is called the "Further Shore", "The Island of Deliverance" from miseries of all kinds, "the ending of births and deaths", the "blowing out of selfishness", the "cooling down of passions", etc. In the Tripitakas and the philosophical works of Asanga, Dharmakirti, Nāgarjuna, Buddhaghosa and other Buddhist commentators, there are faint descriptions of Nirvana, but not anything like a clear definition, simply because Nirvana, like God and the Absolute, eludes definition. A defined God is no God, as God then becomes circumscribed within the defined terms. Similarly Nirvana. When Buddha himself was asked about the "metaphysical essence" of Nirvana, he said: "My mission is not so much to unveil the secrets of blessedness as to win men to its realisation".

Thomas A. Kempis, or whoever who wrote the *Imitation of Christ*, in a similar vein says:

"Why need we concern ourselves about terms of philosophy? He to whom the eternal Word speaketh is set at liberty from a multitude of opinions...He to whom all things are one, and who draws all things to one, and who sees all things in one, may be steady in heart and peacefully repose in God...I would rather feel compunction rather than know its definition." —*Imitation of Christ* I. 3

When pressed for answers concerning the nature of Bliss, whether Nirvana was destruction, whether the world was eternal, etc., Buddha said:

"Every one of them is a mere view or heresy; holding a view belongs to the jungle of opinion, the bonds of heresy; it involves pain, vexation, despair or distress; it does not tend to dissatisfaction, putting away of desire, or to the destruction or to the quitting of it, nor tends it to knowledge or to absolute Buddha-insight or to Nirvana".

Descriptions of Nirvana are found in Buddhist scriptures, but not what we might call definition. And yet, Buddha himself, like Socrates of the West, was very particular to define terms and through his dialogues and questions made his disciples to think clearly and methodically. Yet, on Nirvana there are only descriptions which tell us more what Nirvana is not, than what it is. St Thomas, speaking of God, tells us that we know what God is not rather than what God is, and that we cannot define God, although we can faintly describe Him. This is truer of the Nirvanic state of blessedness.

A young seeker, Kesi by name approached a Jaina monk and asked him about Nirvana. The seeker asked:

"Do you know, O sage, a safe, happy and quiet place for living beings which suffer from pains of body and mind?" The sage replied:

"There is a safe place in view of all, but difficult of approach where there is no old age or death, no pain nor disease. It is what is called Nirvana, or freedom from pain or imperfection which is, in view of all, the safe place, the eternal place, in view of all, but difficult to approach. Those

sages who reach it are free from sorrows, they have put an end to the stream of existence." —*Uttaradhyana* XXIII 80 (*Sacred Books of the East*, Max Muller, Vol. XLV. p. 128

What is, however, clear from Buddhist scriptures and Buddhist monasteries is that Nirvana is nowhere clearly stated as union with God or Brahman. E. J. Thomas tells us:

"It is not stated that in the state of Nirvana there is any identification with God, but it may be said to be feeling after an expression of the same truth".

—*The Life of Buddha in Legend and History*, p. 208

By implication, however, it may not be far from truth if we say that Nirvana is immortality, infinite life, blessed life in the Infinite, in the Uncreated, Unconditioned, which both in Buddhist scriptures and theology is accepted as ultimately Real. The Brahmanic metaphor for the re-absorption of the individual soul *jivatma* into the life of the Supreme Soul or *Paramatma* is compared to the melting of a dewdrop into the shining sea. In Buddhism, from its pragmatic and empirical basis, its seers say: "The calming down of hatred, lust and mental confusion, my friend, is called Nirvana".

Nothing definite or definable is given about Nirvana. The Hinayana monks have their differences with the Mahayana groups with regard to the nature of Nirvana. In a series of lectures I was invited to give at the Mahabodhi Society Hall in Bombay and Calcutta, I put forward my honest conviction that Nirvanic Bliss is the same as the Beatific Vision of the Christians, with this difference that in Nirvana there is no more difference between the Beatifying Infinite and the beatified individual, and that, while God in Christianity is strictly personal in triune aspects, in Buddhism the Unconditioned and the Uncreated is the impersonal

Absolute. In the discussion that followed a Buddhist monk from Ceylon remarked:

"Your view is the outcome of your Christian background and westernised mind. But in Buddhism there is neither God nor any substitute for God. Nirvana to us means freedom from the three signs of being, from *anātta*, *annica* and *dukkha* by attaining Buddhahood".

But there is a yonder shore from where impermanency, no-soul and misery, the three signs have vanished. These lines of argument may lead us into a vicious circle. The same controversy raged when I tried to equate Buddhist concept of Dharma with the cosmic ethical Law and the Christian concept of God with the Lawgiver. *Dhamma* is the Pali form of the Sanskrit word *Dharma*, which is derived from the root *Dhri-Daryate*, which means that which holds us on to the root, the ground of our being. Both in Sanskrit and Pali languages, for both Hindus and Buddhists, Dharma means the sum total of ethics, good living by which we are held on to the Ground of our being, we are enabled to unfold our potential powers. In Hinduism, Dharma enables a man to see God face to face, to unfold the potential divine powers inlaid in man. As Vivekananda had said: "Religion is the manifestation of the Divinity already in man, as education is the manifestation of the perfection already in man".

Whatever be the reactions of some scholars and savants of the West and the sentimental attachment of some Hinayana monks, Buddhism must be understood in its Indian context, as Buddhism is the universal, all-conquering daughter-religion that emerged from the racial and national religion of the Hindus. In the same way, Christianity, both historically and doctrinally and ethically, must be understood in its Jewish context, even though Christianity emerged as a universal religion, cut from the

umbilical cord that once tied the infant Church to Jerusalem and Antioch. Buddhism and Christianity, by becoming separate religions do not, on that account, cease to be the daughters of Hinduism and Judaism respectively.

To be sure, the doctrine of emancipation, enunciated by Buddha in its broadest essentials, is found in the Upanishads. Only the angle of vision changes; terminologies vary; but the substance remains self-same. The Buddhist scriptures speak of Nirvana thus:

"Those who with the spirit of perseverance have freed themselves from sinful desires, and are well exercised in the teaching of Gotama, are in the enjoyment of Nirvana. Their old Karma is dried out, new Karma is no more adhering to them, their heart is freed from the desire of other future lives, the cause of their existence is destroyed, and since no desires arise in their soul, they, the real sages, extinguish themselves like a lamp".

While speaking of Buddha's own Nirvana, the Buddhist scriptures simply say:

"As the extinction of a flame,
Even so was his mind's release". —*Suttanipata* 235

That Nirvana is the entry of the seeker into the Absolute, which is beyond names and forms, *nama rupa*, beyond contingency and unsubstantiality and impermanence, is not merely a matter of inference, or what is merely implied in Buddha's and Buddhist teaching. It is the only possible way of understanding Nirvana in Indian context. The cessation of rebirth and its causes, the cooling down of passions and reaching the island of bliss are unintelligible to an Indian and an Indian Buddhist except in terms of the Upanishadic, and the broad-based Hindu philosophical thought. There is one passage in which Buddha talks with man-to-man intimacy about his reaching Nirvana. Buddha says:

"Having been myself subject to the contingency of birth and experienced its unpleasantness, I sought for Nirvana which is without that contingency—which is unsurpassed and secure from all worldly yoke, and obtained it. Subject to the contingency of decay, the contingency of disease, death, sorrow and sin, I sought for Nirvana which is without such contingency—which is unsurpassed and secure from all worldly yoke, and obtained it. The knowledge with the vision arose: 'Sure is my final emancipation, this is the last birth, there is no longer the possibility of rebirth'. Then this thought occurred to me: 'I have reached this element of things which is deep, difficult to see, difficult to understand, tranquil, excellent, not within the access of mere logic, subtle and to be experienced only by the wise, each for himself'. The multitude find delight in the home, they are attached to the home and rejoice over it. It is difficult indeed for them to apprehend this position of *samsara*, viz. the causal determination of all occurrences in fact—to apprehend also this position of Nirvana, namely, that it is the subsidence of all ideas of belongings, the extinction of desire, the dispassion, the cessation, the Ultimate". —*Chula-Malunkya-Sutta (Majjhima I p.167)*

The fever of Desire being removed, the health of mind and sanity of body return to the individual, and losing one's selfhood, he goes beyond the stream and the transient flux of phenomena. This can only take place in the Absolute, the Ultimate. The very idea of *samsara* or cycle of births and deaths is a Hindu idea which was accepted by Buddha. In the sixth and fifth centuries before Christ, many seers and philosophers went around the whole length and breadth of India preaching deliverance from *samsara*. Vardhamana Mahavira, the founder of Jainism, and Gotama Buddha, the founder of Buddhism, emerged out as the two towering prophets among them, because of the two great religions that emanated from them, which later on became separate from Hinduism, their parent body. Yet, parental features are there. There is no need to become an Indian to detect those features; it is enough even for foreigners to study Buddhism in its historical

context, in Indian background. Then the idea of Nirvana is no more something indefinite, vague or mere nihilism and vacuity; but it becomes the most dynamic and positive concept of the return of separate existence into the Absolute, of the many into the One, the One without a second.

In Nirvana, there is annihilation of the individuality, which is nothing but foam or froth on the sea, a ripple or giant wave, a form and shape, *nama rupa*, or a confection, a name and form, and nothing more. That is extinguished like a burning lamp that dies out for want of oil or wick.

"Just as the fire extinguishes on the exhaustion of all materials of burning, in the same way his (Buddha's) consciousness became completely emancipated".

—*Digha* II p. 157

Yet, the state of emancipation, *Nirvana*, *Pari-nirvana* and *Purna-pari-nirvana*, the three degrees of Nirvana itself, is above description and definition, because it transcends the categories of thought. That is why Buddha was silent about the state of saints, whether they existed or not, what or how they were. It is beyond logic and intuition, as long as we are in a mortal body. A very significant teaching in the Hindu Upanishads is found on the emancipation of spirit, which sounds so much like Buddhist scriptures. Yajnavalkya tells his wife Maitreyi:

"Verily, I say unto thee the soul is complete in itself, within and without. As a mass of intelligence or consciousness it emerges out of these five elements (cf. Buddhist Skandhas) and loses its form of manifestation with their disintegration. There is no cognisance of it after man attains that state". —*Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* II, IV, 12, 13

All names and forms disappear, the dual pair of opposites and relative opposites like happiness and misery, good and evil are all bypassed. There remains only Silence the great *Plenum Void*.

The striking difference, then, from the Christian concept of Beatific Vision, is that in Buddhism individuality is gone, completely gone, lost in the Real, the All-in-All. Hence the great Buddhist Nirvanic aphorism: *Gate, gate, parasamgate, Bhodi swa*—Gone, gone, gone beyond to the other shore, hail. The Jewel in the lotus is attained in OM. Hence the Tibetan epigrammatic saying: *OM Mani Padme Om*—OM Jewel in the Lotus, Hail.

Secondly, there is no room for any personal God in Buddhist philosophy of life and in Nirvanic bliss. The impersonal Absolute takes the place of the Christian personal God. Yet in Buddhism there is the Trinity or *Trikaya*, corresponding to Christian Trinity and the Hindu *Trimurti*; but unlike in Christianity, the Buddhist Trinity is wholly impersonal. That is the fundamental difference.

What is still more striking is that in Buddhism there is the concept of compassion, love, *maitri*, *karuna* in spite of the impersonalism of the Absolute, Being, beyond the physical world of becoming.

The supreme motive of charity or love of neighbour in Christianity is God. But in Buddhism the motive force behind compassion or *maitri* is fellow-feeling, the consciousness that all other beings are also in the same predicament of suffering, needing Nirvana. Walking in the footsteps of Buddha, a Bodhisatwa says:

"When pain and fear are not pleasant to me as they are not to others, then how am I different from others that I should preserve my self and not others?"

In the Mahayana, this *maitri*, love assumes the form of *Mahamaitri* (great compassionate love), which enables the Bodhisatwa say:

"Nirvana lies in the surrender of all things, and my mind is inclined to do so; therefore, if I must surrender all, it is better to give it to all beings. I yield myself to them, let them do with me whatever they like. They may smile

at me, or revile me, bestrew me with dust. Or they may play with my body, or laugh or play wanton; when my body is dedicated to all, I need not think about it. They may get any work they like done by me to their own satisfaction. May there never be any evil to anyone from me. May all who attribute some offence to me, or do me any harm, and all who laugh at me attain enlightenment. May I be a help to the helpless, a guide to the travellers, a boat, a dike, or a bridge for those who want to go to the other side. May I be a lamp to those who want it, a bed for those who require it, a servant of all. May I have the power to dispose myself in various ways, so that all living beings in space may live upon me until they are emancipated".
—*Bhodicharyavatara* III, 16-21

Buddhist monasticism, then, aims as its supreme goal the attainment of Nirvana. In the Hinayana greater emphasis is laid on the personal attainment of Nirvanic bliss, while in the Mahayana greater stress is laid in bestowing Nirvana to others. The Hinayana concept of *Arhatship* enables one to be "free from the intoxicants arising from worldly contaminations and attachments", as *Surangama Sutra* puts it. In Mahayana Bodhisatwa ideal, a monk says: "So long as they do not attain Nirvana, I will not attain it myself", as *Lankavatara Sutra* phrases it. Yet, both Arhat and Bodhisatwa are complementary to each other, one integrating the other. Similarly, the Hinayana and the Mahayana branches of Buddhism are but the systole and diastole of Buddha's heartbeat, even as Catholicism and Protestantism with the innumerable offshoots therefrom are the systolic and diastolic echoes of the heartbeat of Christ. Nirvana is the Buddhist goal, and monasticism is the royal road to Nirvana.

CHAPTER XVII

MONASTIC GOAL—HINDU MUKTI

"Know the Self or Atman as the Lord who sits in the chariot, called the body. *Buddhi* or intelligence is the charioteer, mind is the reins, the senses are the horses, and the objects are the roads. The Self combined with senses and mind, the wise man called the enjoyer. But he who has understanding and is strong-minded, his senses are well-controlled, like the good horses of a charioteer. He who is without understanding, who is thoughtless and impure, never reaches the immortal, or immaterial state, but enters into the rounds of birth. But he who has understanding, who is thoughtful and pure, reaches the state from which there is no return."

—*Kata Upanishad* III, 3-7

"Desire to know God, being single-hearted. One who knows God attains the Highest".

—*Taitt. Upanishad* II, 6

"He, who is the One Eternal in the midst of all transient things, who is Consciousness of all conscious beings, who being One, dispenses unto all their desired things, those sages who see Him as dwelling in their own souls, theirs is the abiding peace; others can never attain it".

—*Svetasvatara Upanishad* VI, 13

Following the footprints of the Buddha, Buddhist monks aim at, and may often reach, the ideal of Nirvana, which is not merely extinction of the causes and results of birth and death, but it is also the vanishing of the pilgrim into the Real, the rest of the traveller in the "Island of Bliss". The footprints along the path through which the traveller passed still remain as the pilgrim disappears. As the Vishuddhi Magga, 16, puts it:

"Mere suffering exists, no sufferer is found,
The deed is, but no doer of the deed is there,

Nirvana is, but not the man that enters it.
The Path is, but no traveller on it is seen".

When we come to Hindu *Ashrams* and *Maths* we hear of the greatest emphasis laid on *Brahman*, the Absolute, on *Isvara*, the personal God and attainment of God, the union of soul with God, about the "melting away of the dewdrop into the Shining Sea". Emancipation, spiritual liberation from the bondage of sin and the "lusts of the flesh, lusts of the world" and worldly vanities which Hindu monks aim at is *mukti* which is blessedness consequential to Self-realisation. *Moksha* or Heaven is essentially the liberated state of self, not essentially any place in the skies up above.

Hinduism, from times immemorial, long before the Upanishads were composed, after the age of Mohenjadaró civilisation and after the jovial, child-like happy Vedic times, set itself up to solve the vital problems of life and death, the mystery of whence and whither of man, what and whither of the soul, the meaning of the cycles of births and deaths, and the Ultimate Reality. Kings and scholars withdrew into the deserts, mountains, or jungle solitudes in order to meditate and find solutions to the basic problems of existence.

Sanyasa or monastic life, usually of eremitic type, is the most traditional form of Indian spirituality unfolded in her philosophy and religious mysticism. Genuine Indian monks, even to this day, consider themselves as a class apart, not subject to any social conventions except that of conforming themselves to the external discipline in dress, food and habits which tradition has handed over to them as their path. A householder's vocation is taken for granted as wholly unsuited to the investigation into the nature of Brahman and pursuing the path that leads one to Ultimate Reality. Swami Vivekananda was fond of quoting the following text to sup-

port the Indian-traditional view that monasticism is the highest path of Self-realisation and Divine light compared to which a householders life is insignificant. He says:

"Like the difference between the biggest mountain and a mustard seed, between the sun and a glow-worm, between the ocean and a streamlet, is the wide gulf between a Sanyasin and a householder".

This basic difference between married life and monasticism is the result of the goal which monks and householders set for themselves. A monk is monk by renouncing what a householder hugs for himself. The world of difference comes from what the Hindu tradition calls: *Kama-Kanchan*, sex and gold. A monk renounces sex in life, deed, thought and desires, uprooting the very urge, as it were, from his conscious and subconscious realms. Sensuality is symbolic of all worldly vanities which nurture and feed the "lust of the flesh", of which the concentrated essence is sex. Monasticism, whether Hindu, Buddhist, Christian, Sufi, Jain or Neo-Platonic, roots out sex and gold by the essential vows of chastity and voluntary poverty.

I have travelled widely in India with the express purpose of visiting many Hindu Maths and Ashrams and see for myself the path the inmates follow towards the attainment of *Mukti*, liberation. Leaving aside the mediocre monks—who form the bulk of monastic organisation—I may mention just one or two who impressed me most as the shining patterns of *Mukti*-ideal of Hindu monasticism.

In the year 1946 I went to Almora, up in the Himalayas, with a view to meeting Ma Anandamayī Devi, who is considered to be a God-intoxicated nun of Hinduism. I pitched my tent near her ashram, and for a number of days I visited her, talked with her, discussed religious topics with her, and I observed her life in minutest detail. I got ✓

the impression that only her body and limbs were moving, but her consciousness was in a state of habitual union with God. She can only talk about God, sing about God with a power to lead even atheists and sceptics and agnostics to a kind of ecstatic and devotional love of God. She was in her youth, one of the richest and most beautiful maidens of East Bengal. But the divine breeze blew, and she vowed herself to chastity and poverty and became what she still is—for even now she is active, the touring messenger of God throughout India—a veritable God-intoxicated nun of India. In France and elsewhere, Mr Jean Herbert has popularised the message of Anandamayi Devi, as Romain Rolland popularised Mahatma Gandhi, Sri Ramakrishna and Vivekananda. She is called *Anandamayi* because she has attained God whom the Upanishads describe as *Anandamaya* or blissful. Her facial expression irradiates a message of joy, inward happiness, all springing from the life of her soul in intimate communion with God.

Swami Brahmananda of the Ramakrishna Mission is one of the great Hindu monks I had the joy to know. His dedicated life and chaste, meditative countenance was itself the mirror which reflected God. Like his great master, Ramakrishna Paramahansa, through strict chastity, he attained great mental and spiritual powers. He was already a liberated soul, a *Jivan Mukta*. He taught us:

"To secure the full development and vitality of the body, brain and mind, continence is essential. Those who observe strict continence develop a strong memory and a remarkable capacity for understanding. By means of continence a special nerve is developed which brings about these special powers. Do you realise why our great teachers have laid so much emphasis upon continence? It is because they knew that if a man fails in this respect every thing is lost"

Sadhu T.L. Vaswani of the Mira movement in Education in Poona is another shining pattern of an apostolic dynamic saintly monk, whose incandescent purity, and lofty idealism is bequeathed to Sri Jashen P. Vaswami, Gangaram Sayandas and others of the Mira School, and to many in this country of ours and the wider world outside.

Among Hindu monks, who do not belong to any established religious order, I have met a few—so few that have to count them at the tip of the fingers—who have reached considerable heights in God-vision. Once I met a young Sikh monk, belonging to the *Udasin Sampradaya*—one of the three main religious orders of the Sikh religion. But, when he reached spiritual realisation the fences of his own religious order were broken away of themselves, even as eggs break when the chicks come out of their shell. His eyes were so innocent that I was reminded of the saying of Jesus: "The eye is the light of the body". So was Swami Nityanand of the Ganeshpuri-Vajreshwari sulphur springs in the Thana District of Maharashtra State.

Of all the unconventional spiritual giants who had beyond all shadow of doubt, reached *mukti* was the late Sri Ramana Maharshi. His simple, God-guided life, and, above all, his realisation of the Vedanta philosophy in his very life attracted many thoughtful disciples from East and West. His great booklets: "Self-inquiry," and "Who am I?" are masterpieces in self-knowledge, much more than Socratic. *Gnoti Seuton*, because Ramana Maharshi's *Atmanam Viddhi* (Know thy soul), is at once: Know thy Real Self, which is Eternal Bliss and Infinite.

Philosophically speaking, then, the Hindu ideal of *mukti* is the emancipation of the spirit from all contaminations with body, mind and everything which is not the Ultimate. In the entire monastic literature, no Hindu monk sang the song of *Mukti* with

such preciseness and power as Sankaracharya, the Aquinas of Hindu philosophy. Here is the English version of Sankaracharya's poetry on *Mukti* as translated by no less eminent a monk than Swami Vivekananda. Sankara says:

"I am neither the mind, nor the intellect, nor the ego, nor
the mind-stuff;
I am neither the body, nor the changes of the body;
I am neither the senses of hearing, taste, smell or sight,
Nor am I the ether, the earth, the fire, the air;
I am Existence Absolute, Knowledge Absolute, Bliss Ab-
I am He, I am He. *Sivoham, Sivoham.* [solute—

I am neither the Prana, nor the five vital airs;
I am neither the materials of the body, nor the five sheaths;
Neither am I the organs of action, nor object of the senses;
I am Existence Absolute, Knowledge Absolute, Bliss Ab-
I am He. I am He. *Sivoham, Sivoham.* [solute—

I have neither aversion nor attachment, neither greed nor
delusion;
Neither egotism nor envy, neither Dharma nor Moksha;
I am neither desire nor objects of desire;
I am Existence Absolute, Knowledge Absolute, Bliss Ab-
solute—
I am He, I am He. *Sivoham, Sivoham.* (I am Siva, I am Siva).

I am neither sin nor virtue, neither pleasure nor pain;
Nor temple, nor worship, nor pilgrimage, nor scriptures,
Neither the fact of enjoying, the enjoyable, nor the enjoyer;
I am Existence Absolute, Knowledge Absolute, Bliss Ab-
I am He, I am He. *Sivoham, Sivoham.* [solute—

I have neither death, nor fear of death, nor caste;
Nor was I ever born, nor had I parents, friends and rela-
tions;
I have neither Guru nor disciple;
I am Existence Absolute, Knowledge Absolute, Bliss Ab-
I am He, I am He. *Sivoham, Sivoham.* [solute—

I am untouched by the senses, I am neither Mukti nor . . .
Knowable;
I am without form, without limit, beyond space, beyond
time;

I am in everything; I am the basis of the universe; every-
 where am I.
 I am Existence Absolute, Knowledge Absolute, Bliss Ab-
 I am He, I am He. *Sivoham, Sivoham.*" [solute—

This song of *Mukti* represents the highest Hindu ideal of emancipation when an aspirant ascends higher and higher, above senses and mind and phenomenal self and reaches the sanctuary of the Highest Self. Contrasted to this highest ideal of spiritual emancipation, when one does not any more fall victim to birth and death, is the vulgar concepts of heaven and hell with undescribable sensual pleasures and pains. The song of Liberation, the Hindu, or more specifically the Vedantic Nirvana song of Sankara is the song of Self that sustains human life, not the servile song of him from whom one gets his bread. Lower grades of monasticism do sing the song of him from whom they get endowments, trust properties and their daily bread. But the Nirvana song of Emancipation is the outburst of one who has broken all fetters of the lower self and has found his fulfilment and realisation in Self. Buddha also sang the song of Liberation when he said:

"Through a round of countless births have I passed fruitlessly in search of the maker of this tabernacle—and painful is the round of births. But now, O Builder of the Tabernacle, I have seen thee; never again shalt thou build me a house. All the rafters are broken and the ridge-pole is broken asunder; and the mind at rest in Nirvana has passed beyond grasping desires." —*Dhammapada*, XI

Monks in Hinduism, broadly speaking, follow the non-dualistic monistic philosophy of Sankara. All nationalist Hindus, unless influenced by the West, are followers of the Vedanta in which there is room for both monism, theism and modified monism. Buddhism parts company with Hinduism in that it emphasised empirical psychology of suffering, and sought the way out in Nirvana, which

is rest in the Void, the *Plenum Void*. It is Void because it is fullness, and the fullness of Fullness itself. There is a significant Upanishadic text which conveys the idea of the fullness of the Void which Buddhist philosophers like Asanga, Dharmakirti and Nagarjuna have propounded. The Upanishadic text runs:

"Om Purnamadah purnamidam purnat opurnamuduchyate,
Purnasya purnamadaya purnameva avashisyate."

—Isa. Upanishad I, I

Which means:

"OM! That Supreme Soul is full; this universe is full,
From Fullness itself comes forth what is full;
By removing fullness from Fullness itself,
What is left behind is Fullness itself."

Reality, then, is Fullness Void. *Maya* is Cosmos-fullness. Even when the Cosmos-fullness disappears into the thin air, into Fullness-Void, this latter remains. Both Buddhist and Hindu monks' supreme effort is to emancipate themselves from the duality and multiplicity of the Cosmos-Fullness and reach the yonder shores of Existence which is Fullness-Void itself. That is the Real behind the apparent, the Substance behind the shadow, and to abide therein is liberation, *Mukti*, *Moksha*. The Upanishads say:

"To dwell in our True Being is liberation; the sense of ego is a fall from the truth of our being." —*Mahopanishad* V. 2

For a clearer grasp of the philosophical essence of the Hindu concept of *Mukti* which all monastics aspire after, the following points may well be borne in mind.

1. In the Hindu path of Self-realisation we have to distinguish:

- (a) the strictly philosophical road,
- (b) devotional practices,
- (c) the path of action, and
- (d) the road of mysticism and intuition.

Hinduism, like Catholicism, is so full of devotional and emotional practices which are the common food for the common man. In this path of devotion or *Bhakti*, there is little of reasoning motive force behind. It is the religion of heart which, as Blaise Pascal says, has its reasons which reason cannot understand. Here there is the vast panorama of image worship, temple music and dancing, singing of *Bhajans*, and *kirtans*, or devotional songs to God or saints, ritualism, gorgeous ceremonies and colourful vestments, sacramental system, etc. It is well known how Sri Ramakrishna, one of the outstanding spiritual giants of modern Hindu India worshipped *Bhavatarami Kali*, the fierce-looking goddess Kali at Dakshineswar Temple, near Calcutta. Religious symbolism was attacked by iconoclasts of renaissance India, movements like the Brahmo Samaj, Arya Samaj, Deva Samaj, Theosophy, etc., when Ramakrishna affirmed in his life the value of images, statues, rituals and choral singing, flowers, incense and other paraphernalia of popular devotional religion.

In popular Hinduism, Catholicism and Mahayana Buddhism there is a big scope for devotional religion, religion of faith, religion with image worship, rosaries, incomprehensible mysteries like incarnation of God in the form of man, miracles, strong belief in heaven and hell and intermediary purgatories, angels and demons, apparitions of disembodied ghosts and spirits, physical resurrection of body, etc. which, from a purely rationalistic and philosophical point of view can have little basis for acceptance. Yet, these devotional, mystical and supernatural forms of religious life keep up the fervour and faith of millions who are not gifted for reasoning and philosophising. These devotional and emotional religions are the metaphysics of the masses who can have their bread of life only through such symbolic and visible, colourful representat-

ions. The rationalists and scientists boast of their achievements and deride popular religious practices of the Hindus, the Catholics and Mahayana Buddhists. Yet, the joke of it is that the temples of rationalists, ethical societies, most of the Non-Conformist groups of Protestantism, etc. are very nearly empty, while the Hindu temples, Catholic Churches and Buddhist Viharas are still full to capacity, in spite of their "irrationality and superstition". What is meat to one may be poison to another. What is superstition to a Julian Huxley or Joseph McCabe may become the bread of life to Ramakrishna, Vivekananda or Gandhiji. And yet both sides are right, because the angles of vision of the contending parties are different. But the Reality glimpsed at is the self-same. Herein is the root for a rich variety of religious experiences and yet, all of them being true and valid, as William James in his *Varieties of Religious Experiences* conclusively proves. This should serve as a base for broad-based apologetics for the aesthetic, artistic, emotional, symbolic and liturgical life in religious practices in Hinduism, Catholicism and Buddhism.

2. Leaving aside the devotional and emotional and heart-religion, we have to focus our attention on to the philosophical basis of *Mukti* or Liberation which Hindu monasticism seeks.

The foundation stone of such a yearning towards and realisation of *Mukti* is to be sought in the Vedantic axion, enunciated by Sankara:

"Brahma Satyam, Gaganmithya.

Jivo (deva) na apara."

Brahman

"Brahman is Reality,

Cosmos is deception,

The soul is like God,

Which is in no way distinct from Him."

It is the realisation of this identification of subjective Self with the objective Cosmic Self that gives

emancipation to the individual. It is only then the hell of loneliness and that prison-sense of the embodied self are got over. A lonely man, without contact with society and God is a miserable wretch. The springs of his creative energies are choked. The release of all the locked-up energy can only take place with Self-realisation or social activities. Self-realisation is itself expansion of the spirit unto Infinity, far beyond the confines of a society or state for which a social reformer or a politician may work. Self-realised dynamics in society and politics is the greatest blessing to mankind. God-realisation is in itself power to an individual which, in due time, overflows into the life of the society at large. The highest ideal in life is achieved with contemplative bliss in Self-realisation, and its voluntary overflow and conscious dynamics in social action.

The four-fold path for Self-realisation, viz. philosophical meditation, mystic wisdom, path of action and devotional faith is stated in the *Gita* when it says:

"Some, by meditation, behold the Self by the self within themselves; others by the path of wisdom, still others by the path of action. Others again, not possessing such knowledge themselves, worship as they have heard from others (illuminated souls); even they surmount death by following with faith what they have heard". —*Bhagavad Gita*,

XIII, 24, 25

Of all these, the path of philosophic knowledge is declared to be the highest. Yet, this path of knowledge or *Jnana Yoga*, this emancipating gnosis, is in no way mere erudition; scriptural scholarship or accumulation of scientific and empirical data. It is essentially the gnosis that sets at liberty the bondage of the soul to body and material existence, removes the soul's separateness from the Infinite. It is the Science of all sciences, the one knowledge that enables one to know everything else. Hindu monasticism, at its best, is the repository and

the laboratory for experimental research into the science of Self and Self-realisation. The lower self is individual ego which, in its isolated existence, lies deep down in his subconscious. Beyond this self is the God-Self which is realised. As Vivekananda puts it: "The lion of divinity asleep in man is to be awakened". When one awakens to his real Self, then the hold and bewitching enticements of sense-sex-bound world gradually loosen their grip on him, and his heart is released from worldly travails. In this very life one enters the threshold of liberation, which cannot be complete until the mortal frame, body, also drops off in due course.

There is one most beautiful hymn of liberation sung in Hindu maths and ashrams which pursue the path of gnosis or redemptive knowledge for emancipation. In few words it gives the metaphysical and psychological essence of liberation, Mukti, the Hindu Nirvana. It says:

*"Namaste sate te jagat Karanaya
Namaste chile sarvalokashrayaya
Namo adwaitatatwaya mukti-pradaya
Namo bahmane vyapine shasvataya.*

*Twamekam sharanyam, twamekam varenyam,
Twamekam Jagat palakam swaprakasham
Twamekam jagat kartru, patru prahatru
Twamekam nishalam nirvikalpam.*

*Bhayanam bhayam bhishanam bhishananam,
Gatim praninam, pavanam pavananam
Mahachaih padanam niyantru twamekam,
Paresham param, rakshanam rakshananam.*

*Vayam twam smaramo, vayam twam bhajamo
Vayam twam jagat-sakshirumam namamah
Sadekam nidhanam niralambam isham
Bhavambhodi potam sharanyam vridhamah.*

—Mahaparinirvana Tantra

This classical hymn from the Mahaparinirvana Tantra I may paraphrase as follows:

is the need of human heart, where speculative reason may not find its sanctuary to enter. The present writer has heard the above Emancipation Hymn sung even in the remote villages of India by Hindus who have no western educational influence in their hearths and homes. They recite this and other Hindu popular hymns in Sanskrit, although only educated Brahmins and the intellectual class study and understand Sanskrit. As some Catholic nuns recite the Breviary and say prayers in Latin without understanding their meaning, but simply sing in choir as they were taught parrot-wise in their convents, so many Hindus recite Vedic and Upanishadic and Hindu epic prayers in Sanskrit, simply because they were orally taught to chant them in Sanskrit every morning and evening.

What a devotional and God-intoxicated people are the Hindus! Many devotional hymns depict God as *Hari*, which means "remover of sins". From crudest animism to absolute monistic idealism they see God and godhead all through. Hindu monks are usually the supporters of popular beliefs and practices, without any critical acumen, without any sense of historicity and experimental and factual values in life which are the keynotes in any religious and philosophical inquiry in the West, not excluding Christianity. Hindu priesthood and monasticism have kept the torch of Hindu civilisation bright lit, enabling us to trace vital continuity of the Indian civilisation from the Vedic Rishis to the days of Ram Mohan Roy, Kesab Chander Sen, Debendranath Tagore, Mahatma Gandhi, Sri Aurobindo, Ramana Maharshi and their likes.

While Hindu monasticism, at its best, hinges on that emancipation which is the result of union of the individual soul with the World Soul, the Cosmic Spirit, the "I am who am" of the Mosaic revelation, there is a rich refreshing variety of emotion-

al religion which gives validity and utility to manifold experiences in a Hindu religious pantheon. The Hindu monastic monism has its parallel in Christian monastic mysticism as represented by Meister Eckhart, Scotus Erigena, Giordano Bruno, Jacob Boheme, Henry Suso and others. Hindu monastic theism, its devotional religious realisation has its counterpart in Christian saints like Francis of Assisi, Alphonsus de Liguori and others. Then both Hindu monasticism and Catholic monasticism run on parallel lines in their acceptance of divinely revealed scriptures, theory of incarnation, sacramental system, hierarchy both ecclesiastical and celestial, and the broad-based approach to religious problems. Yet, parallel lines never meet, nor do Hinduism and Christianity, unless there is much give-and-take policy, and vital creative inter-action, shedding that kind of untouchability and unapproachability which unfortunately exists in religion, and meeting peoples of different religious creeds and persuasions on equal terms.

Once I happened to meet a Hindu monk, who was once a successful businessman. But his reading of the works of Vivekananda and Ramakrishna changed his outlook on life. He told me:

"All the Christian missionaries I approached tell me: 'Christ alone is the door to Eternal Life. Christians, supported by imperial cannons behind, should shed their superiority-complexes and approach us as fellow-humans seeking God at various levels. We accept Christ and His teachings, but not the form of Christianity preached by the missionaries. For us Christ also is our way: but not the only exclusive way at the expense of our own ways'."

Any one who has lived in India, even for a few years can sense the truth of the above statement. That was Gandhi. That was Tagore. That was the late C. F. Andrews who left Anglicanism to become still more a Catholic Christian, more Catho-

lic than even Rome and Canterbury, Catholicism that is co-extensive with God and Man, the Universal. Jalaluddin Rumi says:

"My heart has become capable of every form.
It is a pasture for gazelles and a convent for Christian monks;
And a temple for idols, and the pilgrim's Ka'ba;
And the tables of the Torah and the book of the Koran.
I follow the religion of Love,
Whichever way his camels take." —R.A. Nicholson's
translation of Jalaluddin Rumi

Besides that all embracing catholicity which is characteristic of Hindu monasticism, there is a spirit of tolerance of ideas which is hardly found today anywhere in the West. The message of universal tolerance is the message heard in Hindu, Buddhist and Catholic monasteries at their best, when they have reached the goal of monasticism which in Buddhism is known as *Nirvana*, in Hinduism *Mukti* and in Christianity 'salvation'. The present writer strongly believes that there is a way to harmonise these three various objectives of the three main types of monasticism which have contributed so much to the civilisation of the world, in refining human values, and enriching the spiritual heritage of mankind.

Just for an instance, I will mention the following. Cannot the Buddhist Plenum Void, the Vedantic Impersonal Absolute and the Christian concept of personal God in its trinitarian sense be reconciled by looking at the same Reality from different angles of vision, or by approaching the same Goal at various levels of human consciousness? Similarly, the Buddhist denial of personal soul in its *anatta* is not so antithetical to the Hindu or Christian view of an individual ego with distinct personality surviving after death. In Buddhism the individual consciousness disappears with the disintegration of the *skandas* or 'confection' of five

elements. What is reborn is not the same individual soul, but the karmic forces that make re-appearance of a linked-up individual. It is the karmic force that unifies different births, not an individual ego. The link between births is not the one identical ego, but the necessary circle in cause-effect relations, the karmic forces. In a whirlpool, bushes, wood, corpse or anything caught in that whirling current form but one mass turning round. When these elements are separated, the very force of the whirling around will make them re-appear again, not the same body of materials, but the same forces of whirlpool which make them re-unite. Similarly, the karmic force is that which flows from individual to individual, not the identical "ego". This is orthodox Buddhist view. But I believe even this could be integrated—or amalgamated into the broad-based Hindu and Christian systems on individual soul and personality.

Of all the Hindu monastic orders, the Vedanta School, specially the one represented by modern monks of the Ramakrishna Mission, founded by Swami Vivekananda, stands for that kind of reconciliation, unity, universality and catholicity. If monastic cells cannot do it, others must do it because the message of universal salvation through God is the need of the hour. We have to work for it. We have to achieve it today, now, in this eternal Now.

CHAPTER XVIII

MONASTIC GOAL—CHRISTIAN SALVATION

"As many as received him, to them he gave the power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe in his name; those who are born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God."

—*John I, 12, 13*

"There is now therefore no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus, who walk not according to the flesh. For the law of the spirit of life, in Christ Jesus, hath delivered me from the law of sin and death."

—*Paul, Rom. XVIII, 1, 2*

"You were hithertofores darkness, but now light in the Lord. Walk then as children of Light. For the fruit of the Light is in all goodness, - justice and truth."

—*Ephes. V, 8, 9*

"Casting away all uncleanness and abundance of naughtiness, with meekness receive the ingrafted word, which is able to save your souls. But be ye doers of word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves."

—*James I, 21, 22*

Christianity, like the Hindu-Buddhist world, is essentially religion-culture, a civilisation based on the idea of salvation, redemption, sanctification. Monasticism in Christianity has no other goal but the better and more perfect attainment of salvation of souls. Sanctification has this-worldly connotation in the sense that the souls of men are to be cleansed of its dross, sins and darkness, and are to be transplanted into the life of God through Christ; while the term "salvation" has an other-worldly

connotation, as meaning the safe journey and reaching of the soul in God's heavenly bliss, as a result of the sanctification achieved herebelow on earth. Redemption is the process by which a sinful soul is made a saint, and is saved through the power of Christ the Redeemer, the Saviour, the Logos.

In the colourful, rich variety of monastic orders, religious congregations and eremitical societies within the bosom of Christianity, there springs but one single hymn of salvation, sanctification, redemption. In those religious orders, where one comes across a rich variety of rituals, symbolic worship, liturgical life, choral chants, vocal prayers and community living like the Benedictines, the Carmelites and the Mendicant orders, deeper down one can sense the urge for salvation in heaven, sanctification on earth, underneath all those pompous, gorgeous external forms of worship:

Even a simple genuflection, bowing of the head, folding of hands, kneeling down with closed eyes, and singing lips and a hundred other practices in monasteries spring out from one urge, the great urge for sanctification of their own souls through divine grace and light, and the sanctification of others. If a devout Moslem bows down touching his forehead to the lap of Mother Earth, a living body kissing the dead ashes of the ground, symbolises the recognition of humility of a religious soul, recognising its nothingness before the Highest Lord, the *Allah Ta'la*, then, kneeling down, folding of hands, genuflection, etc. in the Christian monasteries are fraught with deep significance. How dear to a Christian is genuflection! At least as dear for a Hindu or Buddhist monk to squat in *Padmasana* posture, and for a devout Moslem to sit on his carpet or bow down profoundly touching the earth with his forehead!

Yet, the richness of liturgical life, the sacramen-

tal system, the Holy Mass said, sung or solemnised, the hierarchical order in the spiritual life, all these, rightly understood, are nothing but means to the supreme goal a monk aspires after—and for that matter any good conscientious Christian aspires after—which is the sanctification of his soul in this world and his eternal salvation in the next. In Christian monasteries, unlike in most Hindu and Buddhist religious monasteries, there is a sense of urgency and insistence for reaching salvation now, here and now, because the Christians believe that this life is just one single chance God has given us to save our souls. If we miss this one chance, we miss our goal for all eternity. Hence the belief in an eternal hell and eternal heaven is fundamental in popular Christianity. But in the Hindu-Buddhist world the theory of transmigration and metempsychosis makes their votaries somewhat lethargic and go rather slow in their march to God—attainment. The subconscious belief that this life is just a link in the chain of lives, and a certain kind of fatalism—call it *karma* or *kismet*—clog the feet of most monks and adepts in these religious organisations which lack that sense of urgency and earnestness which is more conspicuous in Christian religious orders. From a purely speculative rational point of view, an eternal God excludes the idea of an eternal hell. Yet, from the point of supernatural faith and practical sense, the belief in eternal hell has its validity in the lives of those who, by that very dogma of eternity of hell, have aroused themselves to the highest pitch of diligence and watchfulness and made strong efforts to eradicate their former vices, root and branch, and rise high in the ladder of sanctity. Magdalenes and Augustines are by millions in Christianity. In religion, unlike in speculative philosophy, it is the practical results and experience that count, that give validity and justification to manifold dogmas and rituals which are bread of eternal life

to the faithful, while they remain a matter for scorn and derision for rationalists and positivists and bankers and commercialists.

In the whole work of soul-sanctification and salvation, there is something which Ignatius of Loyola calls: *Sentire cum ecclesia*—to feel in unison with the Church. It is only when, through a process of discipline, study and experience, we arrive at the very heartbeat of the Church *per se* that we understand the great *dogmas* of the Church, which is the speculative side of her teaching, and grasp Her great moral, ethical and spiritual teaching which is the practical ripe fruit of her mission, viz. to let flow into the life of individual members composing the Church the very life of God and Jesus Christ through Christ-likeness. It is the Church that is *semper, ubique et ab omnibus*—always, everywhere and by all—that is the Catholic Church. Not even the papacy is the Church; it is just part of the Church. The head is important; but the head is just one part of the whole body of the Church. A French monarch once said: "*L'état, c'est moi*". But no pope could say: "*L'église c'est moi*". Some emperors have said: "I am the State", and they have gone wrong. But no pope has said: "I am the Church", and they are always right.

Christian monks, like their Buddhist and Hindu fellow-tramps, have always taken this present life as *vallis lacrimarum*—a vale of tears. The Christian dogma of the *Original Sin* is rooted in life-experience much more than merely a supernaturally revealed truth. Life, as we know it, is just misery, until we turn to God and our life partakes of Life Divine. "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity, and affliction of spirit" is what a thoughtful man discovers after experiencing life, and learns the truth of this statement which is found in the Bible, and in other religious scriptures in equivalent terms. Only skin-deep and sense-bound life finds paradise on this earth, and their slogan is reduced to: "Let's eat, drink, make merry

and die". But to a thoughtful monk, this life is neither a paradise nor a hell, but a preparation for either, according as we decide to lead a saintly life or revel in sinfulness.

Sin is fundamental in Christian idea of salvation. What is called sin in Christianity is called ignorance or *avidya* in Hindu-Buddhist philosophy. What is called sanctification in Christianity is generally known as Enlightenment in the Hindu-Buddhist world. Yet, the substance of both Sanctity and Enlightenment is just one and the same, although the angles of vision and ways of expression are different.

In the spiritual journey which a member of any religious order in Christianity makes—I mean the Catholic Christianity which is the most historical, all-comprehensive and deeply spiritual form of Christianity—there are three distinct stages to be noted.

(1) The first is called the *purgative way* during which a monk concentrates on the negative side of uprooting sin and evil dispositions from his heart. In Catholic monasteries there are mines of spiritual instructions and guidance which one can get from the libraries. This guidance can help the inmates of a monastery to wage war against the lusts of the flesh, lusts of the eyes, concupiscence of the body and the vanity of the world. Monasticism is a life-long discipline for the simultaneous work of eradicating vices and planting virtues in the garden of human soul.

(2) The *illuminative way* which a monk enters consists in the positive achievement of sanctity through diligent and constant cultivation of virtues, after all the weeds, tares and cockles of vices and sins have been removed from human hearts.

The illuminative way of Christian monasteries has much in common with the enlightenment in Buddhist monasticism. Like an expert gardener, a Christian monk or nun, true to his or her voca-

tion, first ^{up}tills the ground, removes all tares and cockles, and then sows the best seeds of virtues, goodness and ethical perfection leading one up to the goal of Christian monasticism, which is variously called as sanctification, salvation, redemption and union with God.

(3) The third way is the *Unitive Way* in which human soul lives in a habitual state of conscious and superconscious union with God in which the higher grades of Christian perfection are reached. This romance of the soul in union with the Over-Soul, of the consciousness-speak imprisoned in a bodily frame with Super-Consciousness itself in the life of God is the general theme of lyrics for Christian mystics who thrived so wonderfully in hermitages, in cloisters and monastic cells. St John of the Cross, Catherine of Siena, Francis of Assisi, Tauler, Henry Suso, John Henry Newman, St Bonaventure, Augustine, Jerome, Origen and a hundred other Christian monks and nuns have sung in chorus the song of divine union in rhyme, rhythm and music.

Now, the whole Christian concept of salvation of souls, its philosophy and theology, rests on the following fundamentals.

I. In Christianity, God is God, and man is man. God is the omnipotent, omnipresent, eternal Being that creates, preserves and sanctifies His creation. Man is a speck in God's limitless universe; but on earth, man is the crown of creation, because of his intelligence, will and spiritual potentialities. Justice, Truth, Religion, Art and all creative spheres of man are based on those imponderable values which are consequential to the spiritual soul in man. Soul is not man, nor the body; but body and soul together constitute man. Like Aristotelian hylo-morphists, Christian philosophers also believe that body and soul are two separate beings, but substantially united in a human form. The goal of all

creation, in Christian philosophy, is attainment of God through love. Hence even a small child of five, when he is asked in his parish school, "Why did God create you?", the child will reply: "God created me to know Him, love Him, and serve Him in this life and possess and enjoy Him eternally in heaven".

God has no relations to the created cosmos; but the cosmos has real relations to God as its creator, preserver and destroyer. The real relation in God is *ad intra*, not *ad extra*, and that inward relationship within Godhead constitutes the Christian dogma of Trinity, commonly designated as the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit. Metaphysically, it corresponds to Being, Logos, Love. Religiously, the mystery of Trinity means Father, the Creator, Son, the Redeemer, and Holy Spirit, the Sanctifier of souls. Psychologically, it means soul, intelligence and will. The nearest approach to Christian Trinity is the Vedantic concept of *Sat-Chit-Ananda*, Truth-Gnosis-Bliss, the threefold aspects of Brahman, the Ultimate Reality. Buddhism of the Mahayana trends, Platonism, Philo, Plotinus, Egyptian and Eleusian mysteries and elsewhere also we find echoes and mirage of the Christian concept of Trinity.

II. Salvation of human soul, its sanctification and redemption in Christian soteriology is based on the idea of sin, both original and actual. Original sin is wholesale corruption of human nature resulting from the carnal generation of human beings from Adam and Eve. St Augustine upheld that original sin is transmitted to all children of Eve through sexual union, that burning concupiscence which, in the very act of procreation of the species, saps the vitality, all creative light and energy of the procreating individual. As sex union is the foundation of our first birth, so God-union is the foundation of our spiritual regeneration, "se-

cond birth" of human beings. Added to the general infection of human nature through the original sin is the load of actual sins which men commit through voluntary transgression of God's and Nature's laws which have for their nemesis, unhappiness, misery, neuroses, psychosis and death. "The wages of sin are death", said St Paul, "but through the grace of God Eternal Life". Sanctification, then, is cleansing of one's nature from acts and habits of sins and sinful bends. This concept of catharsis, purification is basic in what is technically called soteriology or theology of salvation.

III. Salvation, then, is both cleansing of our souls, root and branch, from the original and actual sins. The concept of sin as a revolt, rebellion and resistance to the forces of good and God is found also in other Eastern religions. What is sin in Christianity is what forms the First Truth in Buddhism, in the statement of *Dukha* or sorrow, deliverance from which is achieved. It is salvation in Christianity, emancipation in Hinduism, and enlightenment in Buddhism.

It is only superficial Christians who believe that this earth is a paradise and that life, after all, is worth enjoying. The monastic life, all throughout Christendom, is a salutary correction and warning against such a superficial optimistic attitude towards life. Yet, life is not pessimism either. As it is wrong to suppose that Buddhism is pessimism, so it is equally unhistorical and wrong to imagine that Christianity, in its dogma and morals, is optimistic. The only source of cheer, optimism, in Christianity is to be found in that supreme standard of Christian charity which Christ enunciates in these words:

"Hear, O Israel; the Lord our God, the Lord is one; and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength. And the second is this, 'You shall love your

neighbour as yourself'. There is no other commandment greater than these". —*Mark XII, 29-31*

Excepting this knowledge and love of God and of neighbour for God's sake, all is encircling gloom in Christianity. But this golden precept of charity, when fully lived to its minute details in our individual and social life, has power to transform this 'vale of tears' into a heaven on earth. The real, positive contribution of Christianity is charity, which is not merely altruistic compassion or even fellow-feeling, but it means literally love of man for the sake of love of God. Love, in Christian idealism, is rooted in sacrifice, in self-sacrifice, never in self-indulgence and self-gratification. That is the sort of love which Jesus loved mankind with, his self-sacrificing immolation on the Cross. The crucifix is the greatest symbol of divine love. Christian love entails crucifixion of the flesh and the revitalisation of the spirit from within through the grace of God.

"For God so loved the world, as to give His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him may not perish, but may have life everlasting". —*John III, 16*

IV. The Christian concept of salvation is essentially theocentric and Christocentric. It is not anthropocentric as in Stoicism, Pythagoreanism and Theravada Buddhism. Christ, as the incarnate Logos amidst men, is both God and man, true God and true man. He then becomes the bridge between the fallen humanity and the Infinite. He is the raft of salvation to mankind shipwrecked in the sea of sin.

Salvation in this world is tantamount to sanctification which is nothing short of a new birth from God. Salvation, sanctity, purity, God, freedom, infinity etc. are synonyms. The reason is simple. An animal begets an animal. Only God can beget gods. As Jesus puts it:

"I say unto you: Unless a man be born anew, he cannot see the kingdom of God. Nicodemus said to him: How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born again? Jesus answered: In truth I say unto you, unless a man be born again of water and of the Holy Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the spirit is spirit".

—*John III, 3-6*

Christ is said to be new Adam in whom all believers are born in God through the grace of the Holy Spirit. Baptismal initiation through "water and Holy Spirit", is symbolic of this new birth, when the initiate is born in the kingdom of God. Yet, there is nothing like faith-justification in Christianity as Luther, Calvin and others taught. Imputed justification solely on the merits of Jesus the vicarious Redeemer, without man himself struggling every nerve to live up to that faith, is futile. Faith must operate through charity. Faith without deeds is dead. "If I have all faith so as to move mountains and have no charity, it profiteth me nothing" (I Cor. XIII, 2). Catholicism has consistently taught the sanest and soundest Christian doctrine that sanctification and salvation depend not merely on beliefs and faith, but more on inner transformation of man's life and soul through the grace of God and active co-operation of human will. The Tridentine Council says:

"Justification is not merely the remission of sin, but the sanctification and renovation of the interior man by his voluntary acceptance of graces and gifts, whence the unjust is made just, the enemy a friend, that he be made the heir according to the hope of life everlasting".

—*Sess. VI, Chapter 7*

That is the reason a Christian monk, in his monastery, and Christians at home, pray God as though everything depended on God's grace and mercy, but exert themselves and struggle on with undaun-

ted iron will, as though everything depended on themselves. In other words, Christian concept of sanctification is a double-edged sword which opens up the infinite reservoir of God, and the limited resources of man.

As one studies the life-long spiritual discipline, meditation, prayers, hard work, including manual work such as farming, carpentry, dairy farms, etc., studies, intellectual and spiritual apostolate in monasteries in the Christian West, one gets convinced how the theory of sanctity, holiness, charity works in practice. Unlike in Hinduism and Buddhism, Christianity emphasised the idea of personality and individuality, which is one of the main positive contribution to world civilisation at large. Man has a personality. God Himself is endowed with a personality without its limiting adjuncts—nay, God has three Persons in one Divine Nature. In this life, it is the individual soul, the person that matters most in the work of salvation, not an amorphous impersonal life-force of scientists and pantheists. After this life it is the individual person that reaps bliss or misery, according to his deeds and deserts on this earth. In Christianity, it is the very same person that was living in this world, that enters heaven or hell after the dissolution of physical body at death, not the *karmic* forces that determine the rebirth of a new individual in the cycle of births and deaths.

How does the inner transformation take place? Through grace. It is interesting to note that grace is defined as "participation of Divine Nature in a rational creature". It is participation like an iron ball thrown into the burning furnace becomes red-hot like fire, iron participating in the nature of fire. Yet red-hot iron is not fire itself. But by grace man participates the very Divine Nature,

which is nothing but Godhead in us. This is a significant point to be noted to understand the language and psychology of the great Christian mystics who experienced a kind of monistic and idealistic realisation, all those long interesting texts which Aldous Huxley marshalls in his *Perennial Philosophy*. It is symptomatic of the disease of the modern world that it takes no note, or little note, of this deeper wisdom of *Perennial Philosophy* which, both etymologically and doctrinally, is love of God, who is Wisdom itself. Contrasted to the idealism of Aldous Huxley is the rationalism of *Will Durant* who, in his *Story of Philosophy*, finds no place for those great Christian philosophers like Aquinas, Augustine and Dionysius the Aeropagite, but devotes his book—otherwise quite valuable and interesting—to Greek and Anti-Christian European and Western philosophers like Voltaire, Spinoza, Herbert Spencer, Nietzsche, and other deistic, humanistic and existentialist philosophers. Aristotle prepared the way to Aquinas, as Plato for Augustine. Yet, Durant ignores Christian philosophy altogether in his widely publicised and well-written *Story of Philosophy*. To consider Western philosophy, ignoring Christianity, is as futile as writing the history of Eastern Philosophy ignoring, or even opposing Hinduism and Buddhism from India, Taoism, Confucianism in China, Shinto, Bushido and Zen in Japan. Nagarjuna, Vasubandhu, Milareppa, Sankara, Dharmakirti, Patanjali and other philosophers of the East are inconceivable without the background of Hindu-Buddhist culture. Similarly in the West, today there would be no Aldous Huxley, T.S. Eliot, L.P. Jacks, Jacques Maritain, C.G. Jung and others without Christian background. But Julian Huxley, H.G. Wells, Bertrand Russell and others could have flourished purely on the humanistic and scientific traditions of the West with a surface-tinge of

Christianity. So were Hegel, Benedetto Croce, Giovanni Gentile, John Dewey and others.

As we find the concentrated essence of the Hindu-Buddhistic culture in its spiritual heights in Hindu *maths* and Buddhist monasteries, the spiritual quintessence of Christianity is still to be sought and found in Christian monasteries. Even after fifteen centuries, Montecassino Benedictine monastery is still a lighthouse of that esoteric spirituality of the Christian West. During the Second World War the Americans bombed and destroyed Montecassino, that great monastic town of Italy, where the present writer spent some time studying the monastery, with its art, architecture, archaeology, liturgical and literary achievements. The American Dollar has rebuilt that monastery; but the rebuilt Montecassino will never be the same. Skyscrapers of New York and Chicago have nothing in common with the silent, studious, meditative, contemplative cells and cloisters of the ancient Christian monasteries.

What does that midnight office sung aloud in choir mean to the religious? During the choral office the monks feel in unison with the heartbeat of the Church *per se*, the ideal approximation of the Kingdom of God on earth, the "mystical body of Christ", the spouse of Christ without a taint or wrinkle", as St Paul describes her. The Breviary is one of the greatest mines of spiritual treasury and mystical experience. For monks and nuns, priests and some laymen, there is no greater symposium of love Divine and gnostic vision of God and Reality than the private or solemn recitation of the Divine Office. The hymns, antiphons, versicles, the psalterium—recently revised by the Sacred Congregation of Rites—its music and ceremonies, all have a deep meaning for enkindling flames of divine love in monks and nuns. Seven times a day

the monks recite their breviary which has its own readings for each day, with great variety, both doctrinal and ethical for the religious of both sexes who recite them regularly. The practice of reciting the Matins and Lauds at midnight is still being kept up by the Benedictines, Capuchins, Dominicans and other ancient orders. The Buddhist and Hindu choral recitation of community prayers lack that variety and subliminal subtleties which are found in a Catholic breviary. When heart and mind are made one with what one recites and sings from the Breviary, the present writer can testify it from his own experience, it has an uplifting, soul-ravishing and ecstasy-engendering influence in us. But, when the Breviary is recited with negligence, or as a matter of daily routine or out of canonical compulsion, then it becomes a burden, it loses its music, poetry and soul-nourishing power in us.

For clerical orders and ordained priests, one of the chief avenues of reaching the goal of their monastic call and attain spiritual perfection is the dutiful, devoted and meditative saying of their daily Mass which, symbolically repeats the offering of Christ on Calvary, in obedience to His injunction to His disciples: "Do this in my remembrance". The sacramental food which Christ shared with His disciples on the eve of His betrayal and crucifixion was known to early Christians as *Agape*, which originating as a love-feast and mystical food, gradually got identified with the Eucharistic feast and communion of souls with God and Christ through sacramental food. The sacrifice of Mass, when understood in the sense in which Saints understand it, is a powerful vehicle for monks, the laity, nuns and priests to ascend the Himalayan heights of spiritual perfection. But when Mass is said negligently, as merely a routine, or for getting the Mass stipend, or out of human respect and external show, then it congeals the spiritual life of

the soul. In Lamaistic monasteries of Tibet, during the liturgical and religious functions, the Lamas wear stoles, chasuble and other liturgical vestments which are very much like the vestments used during the Catholic Mass. But, parallels in liturgy and sacramentalism never meet. Yet, both have their own validity and on that basis we can meet as friends.

The goal, then, that is sought in monasteries is the attainment of Christian perfection, personal sanctity, holiness, immaculate purity and salvation of their souls in this world, now. Many aim at the goal but few in monasteries reach there. Many of them caught up in the net of social security and following the policy of least resistance sleep away, and they miss the goal of their vocation. The greatest love song ever sung, the most melodious and ecstatic lyric ever to be heard on this earth, the song of monks and nuns, the eternal *Theragata* (the song of monks) and *Therigatha* (the song of nuns) are enshrined in Hinayana Buddhism, in Mahayana, in Catholicism, in Hinduism and elsewhere when monastic vocation is taken seriously and one has lived it fully in its depths and heights.

In monasteries one regains the paradise which was once lost in the snares and entanglements of the world. We become heirs to God again, with a love-romance a thousand times more blissful than anything a worldly person can imagine. We know God and Self in monasteries better. Plato said:

"This, therefore, in the soul is like the divine nature, and a person looking at and recognising all that is divine, both God and intelligence, would thus specially know Himself."

—*Alcib. I. C*, 28

From the knowledge of self within the body, a monk rises higher to the knowledge of the Self of the Universe, God. And then, again, from the knowledge of God, one descends down to the knowledge

of self and soul of man and the things of this world. While the empirical and positivistic scientists are lost in the vortex of phenomena, without ever being able to ascend to the tabernacle of the Most High, humble, self-denying, studious and meditative monks, from the summits of the knowledge of God come down to the knowledge of Nature, Society and all sciences. For, in monasteries thrived great scientists like Albert the Great, Roger Bacon, Thomas Campanella, Giordano Bruno and others.

Once they attain their perfection, their own inward perfection, monks and nuns go to the world to preach the "glad tidings of salvation" to many others, the gospel of remission and expiation of their sins and hope of eternal salvation, immortal bliss in God in the life beyond.

In this monastic pilgrimage of man to the bosom of God, the moon-landing achieved by the three American astronauts is of no avail. The proposed possible Mars-landing is at a discount. Space conquest is vanity and vexation of the spirit. There is no other way for inward happiness and bliss but that of self-knowledge, self-purification and God-realisation.

O beata solitudo, O sola beatitudo—O, the blessed solitude, O the only beatitude, said the monks and nuns of East and West, of Catholicism, Hinduism and Buddhism. We need this solitude, this isolation from creation, this *Kaivalya* for us to soar higher than the astronauts and reach, soft-landing in the very lap of the Infinite. O man, thou art not dust, thou art That; thou art God's child, of His very nature and substance. Forget not thy inheritance which is Godhead, not shining gold and evanescent bodily lusts and skin-deep pleasures. Monasticism has pointed out the path to you, and you, my soul, my dear, hasten thither.

CHAPTER XIX

MONASTICISM—A BALANCE SHEET

"Make thyself an island; work hard, be wise! when thy impurities are blown away, and thou art free from guilt, thou wilt enter into the heavenly world of the elect. Thy life has come to an end, thou art come near to death, there is no resting place for thee on the road, and thou hast no provision for thy journey."

—*Dhammapada XVIII*

"The knowing Self is not born, it dies not; it sprang from nothing, nothing sprang from it. The Ancient is unborn, eternal, everlasting; he is not killed, though the body is killed.... The wise who knows the Self as bodiless within the bodies, as unchanging among the changing things, as great and omnipresent, does not grieve. That Self cannot be gained by the Veda, nor by understanding, nor by much learning. He whom the Self chooses, by him the Self can be gained. The Self chooses his body as his own. But he who has not first turned away from his wickedness, who is not tranquil, and subdued, or whose mind is not at rest, he can never obtain the Self even by knowledge."

—*Kata Upanishad*

"You know well enough that when men run in a race, the race is for all, but the prize for one; run, then, for victory. Every athlete must keep his appetites under control; and he does it to win a crown that fades, whereas ours is imperishable. So I do not run my course like a man in doubt of his goal; I do not fight my battle like a man who wastes his blows on the air. I buffet my own body, and make it my own slave; or I, who have preached to others, may myself be rejected as worthless."

—*I Cor. IX, 23-27*

Life of man on earth is an adventure. When the spirit of risky living and continuous adventure is lacking, life loses its charm, dynamism, meaning. Human pilgrimage here below cannot be

in any other way conceived by a rational being but as a journey to Eternity, God.

There is an encircling gloom all around man's life; a veil of illusion envelope our existence here-below. There is *Maya*—the great cosmic illusion—or the creative power of God, relativity, which obscures the vision of the Real, Eternal, God. That torch that penetrates behind the gloom and darkness of life is the light of Religion, Dharma, the pathway leading us up to the goal of human pilgrimage. Multitudes of humans, the rabble are born in *Maya*, illusion, grow in *Maya* and die therein. But religious wisdom, that light of perennial philosophy makes us rend the veil of the vague, the *purdah* of relativity, and enables us to glimpse into the glorious sunshine of the Real, God.

The earth looks flat; but it is not flat, it's round. The sun seems rising and setting; but it does not. The geocentric concept is based on senses, while heliocentric is based on reason. Man seems to be born and dying; but he does not, because death is merely the limit of our eyesight like the far off horizon. Pleasures of senses seem to make us happy; but they do not; sufferings and crosses seem to make us miserable; but they do not. Man seems to be ending with death; but he does not. Birth is the sunrise; death is the sunset, the setting of souls, not their end. There seems to be a blue sky up above; but there isn't. Science does not throw light on ultimate realities of life. It just studies phenomena and generalises the laws underlying their functions both inductively and deductively. It is left to Philosophy and Religion to tell us about the Ultimate Reality, about the whence and whither of human pilgrimage on earth, the nature of Life and Death and the Immortal Beyond. Both Religion and Philosophy must cater to the vital needs of the human heart at various levels, according to the degree of spiritual development of in-

dividuals. Hence the justification for popular practices and commonsense morals for the masses, while their esoteric wisdom is restricted to a few gnostics and speculatives, mystics and saints both within the cloisteral precincts of monasteries and outside.

The present writer holds that philosophy and religion are but the two sides of the same medal; religion is practical, philosophy and philosophy is speculative religion. Philosophy feeds the intellect, mind and intelligence, while religion nourishes morals, ethics, heart. Both are needed since man is a composite being of thought and will. Beyond all these dual opposites lies the spirit which is the Ground Divine of all our philosophies and religions.

Human family is one, not two, one without a second, not many. We are all tarred by the same brush. Colour of the skin, trends of cultures, greater emphasis on this or that aspect of culture, religion and civilisation do not wall out mankind into hemispheres and compartments. All children of Adam and Eve, man and woman, are the same everywhere, at all times, in fundamental human values and truths. There are grades and gradations in civilisation, culture and consciousness. But human family is indivisibly one, specially in this Atomic and Sputnik Age when this planet of ours has become much smaller than ever before.

Man is one, though men are many. Religion is one, although religions are many. Philosophy is just one, although philosophical systems are many. All are one, one without a second—*ekameva advitiyam*—although all are or seem to be many.

We believe that the concentrated essence of Perennial Philosophy and Eternal Religion—what in Hinduism we call *Sanatana Dharma*—is best found in monasteries. Perennial Philosophy about which Aquinas, Sankara, and in our own days Aldous

Huxley, Leo Tolstoy, Mahatma Gandhi, Rabin-dranath Tagore, Jacques Maritain, C.S. Lewis and others speak, is so different from phenomenalism of the positivistic, pragmatic and utilitarian philosophers of our age. We speak today of Marxist Philosophy, philosophy of Kropotkin and Kierke-gård and others. But there is absolutely no common ground between these economists, anarchists, existentialists with what is generally known as perennial philosophy, which is rooted in the very fundamental make-up of man, his basic instincts, aspirations, potentialities and latent powers. The world today has become so noisy, the knowledge has grown so much extensively, that deeper intensity of the human soul, inner quiet and the ocean of peace within the heart of man are all fast becoming legends of the past, and no more believed in by our modern psychotic, neurotic and fidgety mankind.

If we are to draw up a kind of balance-sheet of the achievements and failures of monasticism, both Christian and Hindu-Buddhist, we have to state that the esoteric core of the wisdom of perennial philosophy and eternal religion is still to be searched and found in hermitages and monasteries which are the natural home of philosophic wisdom and religious realisation. Outside monastic discipline, religion tends to become social pageantry and show, and philosophy mere pragmatism and positivism. We may safely draw up a balance-sheet as follows:-

1. Deeper springs of Perennial Philosophy and Esoteric Religion have found their natural nursery and repository and reservoir in monastic institutions, specially in the contemplative religious orders. In Tibet—which was the most monastic country in the world, with roughly one third of its total population embracing monastic life—there were those silent lamas and mahatmas who live in intimate communion with Reality. In other monasteries

of both the East and the West there are still found men and women living in a state of trance, as a result of their intimate communion of souls with the Over-Soul, of man with God through contemplative prayer and meditation and ecstasy. Helena Petrovna Blavatsky has described to us her experience with the Yogis and the Mahatmas of Tibet who helped her to understand the esoteric wisdom, which she calls "Secret Doctrine". Any one travelling up in the Himalayas, or living in a Carthusian, Cistercian, Benedictine, Dominican or any other monastic institution of the West, can still come across God-intoxicated souls, who live like strangers to this world, but so close and dear to God. I have myself known saintly monks like Fr Ludovico Fanfani, Vincent NeNab, James Alberione, Don Giovanni Rossi and others. They are the living scriptures of religion; they are the walking libraries of philosophic and theological wisdom. They are the channels of divine messages for mortals treading the trackless, dark paths of worldly jungles, with snares and entanglements to drown them in the sea of life.

2. Hindu-Buddhist monasticism, generally speaking, has given us the higher grades in speculative philosophy about the Absolute and the Maya. Impersonal Absolute has as much validity in speculative philosophy and mysticism as a Personal God in ethics, morality and practical religion. Christianity—and Christian monasticism in particular—has given us the grand ideal of personality which is inseparable from Christian civilisation, personality of God and personality of man. In Christian concept, the Absolute Godhead is only *ens rationis*; what is real is the Three Persons in Godhead. While in Christianity, personality of God is realism and the Impersonal Absolute is mere nominalism, in Hindu-Buddhist thought personality is mere nominalism—*namarupa*—while the Impersonal Ab-

solute is realism. This difference in approach is mainly responsible for the two divergent trends in the civilisation of Christian Europe, and the civilisation of the Hindu-Buddhist Asia. Both historically and psychologically, the idea of personality is fundamental to Christianity, with the idea of personal responsibility to make or mar one's destiny. Hence in Christian monasteries there is more dynamism, a variety of fields of apostolate and ministry and action, all springing from the depths of that Christian idealism based on the concept of personality, human person perfecting himself with his own individuality and initiative, working hand-in-glove with God, the Supreme Person.

Physics, chemistry, astronomy, biology and other fields of positive sciences tend to confirm the Vedantic position of absolute monism and the Buddhist position of Plenum Void. Yet, for religious souls, there is personality when they stand face to face with that Impersonal Absolute. That is why a devotional mystic like Ramakrishna, an intellectual giant like Ram Mohan Roy, Keshab-Chander Sen, Dayanand Saraswati and other great modern Indians conceived God as a person; and themselves as created persons, struggling to raise themselves up to God both through the grace of God and their own steel will. If they succeeded, the merit was not theirs, but God's and of His grace; if they failed, the fault was not God's, but theirs, because defects and faults can only spring from our creatureliness, and not from the Creator, the Good Supreme.

3. Monasteries are the veritable fountains that water and nourish the lay world. It is mainly due to Buddhist, Hindu and Christian monks and priests that the torch of faith and religious organisations still exist, surviving the vicissitudes of centuries, through constant adjustment to the ever-changing conditions and pressurising concepts of times.

Monks who have betrayed their religious pro-

session, and priests who have deflected from their religious vocation and ideals, are mainly responsible for the lapses and failures and shrinking and decaying of religious organisations. "When the shepherds go lax, the vineyard of the Lord languishes pale", said Dante Alighieri. Hence it becomes imperative that there should be monastic reforms from time to time in order that the members may keep up the basic ideals of monastic life, that rampant abuses, routine, idleness, security-trammels may not choke the supreme ideal of Self-realisation and salvation of souls. St Theresa of Avila and John of the Cross were great reformers of the Carmelite Order. So was Swami Vivekananda in our century a reformer who restored traditional Hindu monastic order to its pristine purity. Lenin speaks of "continuous revolution" of the proletariat in order to keep up the revolution of the working class. In religion too, there should be something like continuous reformation both individual and collective in order to keep up the original ideals and spirit which once gave birth to religious orders and monasticism, and which should continue to nourish and mould the lives of aspirants towards the great ideal of God-vision and soul-sanctification.

In every monastic order there are the progressives and the stationary conservatives. For the progressive revolutionaries in monasteries, their past history is merely a springboard to reach out to a still greater unborn future, while for the conservatives their glorious past becomes merely a clog and prison-house stopping them to launch out into a still more glorious future. During the decade I lived in Dominican monasteries in various places, I could see hundreds of Dominican friars very strict in their monastic observances, but hopelessly conservatives who cling to their past, without preparing themselves for the uncertain and unborn fu-

ture. In this fast-changing world, it is not safe to sleep in the tents of our forbears, without feeling the pulse of the world in which we live and without racing ahead of times. But those few progressive Dominicans in Italy and England whom I had the joy to know and live with were always held suspect. They were never promoted to positions of authority and power. Fr Victor White, O.P. was a pioneering progressive in Oxford. Yet, this representative minority can carry the day with them and effect the needed reform so that, shedding the outworn shells, they may preserve the essential traits of the Dominican Order; and many more monks with the same dynamism, energy, vision and God-thirst like St Dominic, St Thomas Aquinas, Savonarola and Tauler may come out of the Dominican cells, monasteries and convents. This is the yearning and prayer of one who still upholds the ideals of the Dominican Order, although canonically out.

When internal reforms do not keep monasteries up-to-date, what happens is that reforms sweep from without, when the baby is thrown and washed out with the bath water, as it happened in Protestant reform—or revolt—in the sixteenth century. There were then many abuses in monasteries which had grown plutocratic, opulent and self-indulging, when many monks, priests, bishops and even a few popes betrayed their sacred trust and high call. Then came that religious earthquake which divided Christendom into two, one warring against the other. If reform from within had taken place at the right time, Protestant reform and extreme limits of non-conformism could have been avoided. But *Karma* must work out its own nemesis for expiation, and Western Christendom was rent into two, after the earlier schism of the Greek Orthodox groups of Churches.

As we need periodic reforms in monasteries, so

sults from pastoral ministry. In some dioceses I know priests who are acting as separate monads, independent bishops with no zeal for the salvation of souls, no unswerving loyalty to *Dharma* and *Sangha*. The Holy See in Rome must find out facts in far off lands and take steps to correct the evils in time lest the unity of the Church be endangered.

This reform is needed in the Hindu-Buddhist world all the more, because monasticism in Asia is still a closed-door idealism, without that receptivity to new light which is the characteristic of the West. Although depth-philosophy and depth-religion in Hinduism, Buddhism and Catholicism meet on the bedrock of the Ultimate Reality and imponderable human values, there is much warring and bickering going on the surface-layers of religious experience. C.G. Jung speaks of "Depth-psychology". There is also depth-philosophy and depth-religion which is the mainstay of spiritual existence. That is the depth-religion and depth-philosophy which underly all other religions and philosophical systems. But modern existentialism, Marxian philosophy, etc., have little to do with depth-religion and depth-philosophy which still thrive strong and pure in monasteries, which are laboratories and research-centres on God, soul, the Ultimate, and imponderable ethical values. But monasteries of the East and the West must be prepared to learn one from the other, even as religious systems and civilisations of the East and the West, so that world-unity, world-citizenship and world-culture may be established on deeper and surer foundations than mere empirical sciences which at one moment give blessings through medical relief and easy communications and, at other times, atomises Hiroshima and Nagasaki in an instant. Thermonuclear science has thus become more a curse than blessing, as are other fields

of science, when deeper ethical and human values are set aside, and science is prostituted in the hands of power-politicians, financiers and bankers and other merchants of Sin and Death.

4. Monasticism can still become a stabilising factor in world affairs, if the old revolutionary ideals of the founders and prophets of religion are revived and revitalised from within. Christianity is nothing if it is not the continuation of the revolutionary ideals of Christ. But Christian revolution runs diametrically opposed to the French Revolution, Soviet Revolution, Nazi Revolution and other revolutions of modern times. In religion the fight is against the tiger and ape in man, against the lusts of the flesh and blind sexuality, against war and violence. The Kingdom of God and kingdom of Caesar, often in history, stand in sharp contrast and diametrically opposed to each other. In some rare exceptions Caesar and God have stood united as in the Empire of Asoka and Kanishka in India, Constantine the Great in Rome, Emperor Louis IX in France and in the Tibetan Lamaist regime. Politics says: "He is great who conquers the world". The language of religion says: "What does it profit a man if he conquers the whole world and suffers the loss of his own soul?". Buddha also compares his followers to warriors and conquerors, but conquerors of their own lower self, of the 'I' and 'Mine' which engenders suffering.

After being in the thick of journalism and politics, the present writer can testify that monasticism and religion should leaven up world politics today. They cannot bring world peace if minds and consciences of men are at war with themselves inwardly. The outward disorder and war-psychoses and truce-neuroses are the externalisation of the disorder and psychoses within the mind of man. War and violence start in the minds of men, and it is

there that we should seek remedy for this mounting waves' of hatred, violence and war. Man is his mind. As he thinks, so he becomes, the mind assuming the form of the object thought of, even as a white linen assumes the colour of the dye in which it is dipped. It is the mind of man that makes a heaven out of a hell, and a hell out of heaven. In this mental cure and moral tonic, I believe, monasticism has a great share to contribute. But monks, nuns, priests and mystics are ignored in world politics. Even Plato and Plotinus, Buddhas and Laotzes are ignored by our politicians in their political conclaves and diplomatic talks. Mahatma Gandhi is merely a name in India Today.

If the mountain does not go to Mohamed, then Mohamed has to go to the mountain. If modern society and the world do not go to monks and monasteries for light and advice, then monks and nuns should go out to the world and people outside, so that the saving wisdom of prophets and scriptures enshrined in monasteries may fulfil their saving mission in the world. Even if only one out of a million listens to the "word of life", and is inspired by the example of monks and nuns, the apostolic toil is amply rewarded.

5. Human nature, ontologically and psychologically, is good. The original sin has corrupted only the outer rind of the soul, not its depths; *Maya* envelops only on the surface layers of creation, not its neumenal depths. Human nature will get itself reformed and converted when it enters into itself, in the light of its own experiences. The conversion of Aldoux Huxley from stone-dry rationalism to soul-deep mysticism is typical of this modern age. Sri Aurobindo, from a violent terrorist and revolutionary in Bengal politics, became converted to the rank of outstanding mystics, contemplatives and esoteric philosophers of all times.

These and allied examples in the West and the East is an eye-opener. It enables us to forecast the future of monasticism.

The restlessness of human heart is the restlessness of a compass needle when removed from its North Pole. God is the North Pole of human hearts. After all our wanderings and frustrations, vexations and futilities, we have to return to God and exclaim aloud with St Augustine: "Thou has created our hearts for Thee, O Lord; and it shall ever remain restless until it rests in Thee". Our politicians, journalists, businessmen, economists, technicians, and men and women in every walk of life, must needs return to the centre of their selves which is God. Dharma is not God; it is just the path-way to God, God's laws indelibly inscribed in the heart of man. You may dodge these laws and violate them for a short while; but for long you cannot go on transgressing them without serious damaging effects in your mind, heart and soul, and your deepest Self. If virtue is its own reward, then vice is its own nemesis.

The forecast, then, regarding the future of monasticism in the world is something like this. The world is fast growing into a vast robot in which humans are becoming cogs and clogs. Serious reflection and deeper thoughts evaporate from the hectic and restless life of man today. From the highly industrialised and mechanised life of the West, the Eastern man also, in cities and towns, is fast becoming a victim of the machine civilisation. The clock cannot be put back. But if modern man, 'caught up in the vortex of cut-throat economics and power-politics, in machine civilisation and amoral technology, were to rediscover his own self through a process of deep introspection, then he will turn out to be religious. If he goes all the way along the road, he will find a board on which it is written: "Alone, alone you sail along,

there that we should seek remedy for this mounting waves' of hatred, violence and war. Man is his mind. As he thinks, so he becomes, the mind assuming the form of the object thought of, even as a white linen assumes the colour of the dye in which it is dipped. It is the mind of man that makes a heaven out of a hell, and a hell out of heaven. In this mental cure and moral tonic, I believe, monasticism has a great share to contribute. But monks, nuns, priests and mystics are ignored in world politics. Even Plato and Plotinus, Buddhas and Laotzes are ignored by our politicians in their political conclaves and diplomatic talks. Mahatma Gandhi is merely a name in India Today.

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bridges whenever and wherever we can between religions, races, cultures and nations of the East and the West.

This can only happen when we stress on points of agreement rather than on differences, and we accept differences through a healthy understanding of the opposite point of view, agreeing to disagree on points far removed from God-vision and Self-realisation. We have to accept all scriptures, all prophets, all temples, all religions, all varieties of religious experiences. This is not a medley. This is all-embracing catholicism which acknowledges all humans as our blood-brothers, destined for the same heavenly bliss, *nirvanic* Void. We should accept the failures and faults of others as our own, because we are all members of the same mystical body of God. By hurting others, we hurt ourselves. By doing good to others, we do good to ourselves, because we are parts of one stupendous whole, whose body is Nature, whose soul is the Ultimate Reality. as Dionysius the Aeropagite says: "God is the Life of all that lives; the Being of all that exists". Pl. *Div. Nom.* 1.3.

The Buddhists, the Hindus and the Christians, at least in their monasteries, should not remain isolated from the rest, like frogs in the well, each fancying that theirs is the only real world of values. In order that they may be enabled to see the vast ocean in front of them, it is desirable that monks from various religions are given facilities to study in monastic orders of religions other than their own, by allowing them to stay inside as home-members of a religious order. I bless those monks who accepted me in Hindu monasteries and Buddhist *viharas* as an inside member, as one of their own. I wish that Catholics also in their turn invite sincere inquirers into their monastic cells and make them study the Catholic position, not from the

solitary sailor". That is the entrance to monasticism. Of his own accord, out of sheer necessity springing from the monastic urge, he will discard his wealth, social position, fleeting joys and pleasures of sense and sex, and bury himself within the precincts of a monastery, or he will create a monastery of his own, his own hermitage wherein he will go all the way towards Self-realisation.

Some religious superiors in both the East and the West are alarmed at the thought that the seductions and glamour of modern life may stand in the way of many young men and women to follow monastic vocation. The present writer does not share such gloomy prospects for the future of monasticism. There are likely to be more lapses and superficiality of life within monasteries; but the number of vocations is not likely to dwindle in any way. The world has nothing to offer as an honourable alternative to the monastic ideal which Buddhas and Bodhisatvas have offered to their followers. Positions of power and authority, pleasures of sense and sex, gold and silver have their own attractions. But, to a thoughtful mind, attractions to Virtue, Values, Truth, Love Divine, God, Soul-beauty are a thousand times more greater. Either a man who, in the words of Blaise Pascal, "is a reed, but a thinking reed", ceases to be thinking, reflecting and introspecting, or he must find outlet for his higher spiritual urges in monastic or quasi-monastic and eremitical environment. Monasticism cannot be blotted out from the face of the earth as long as there is even one single soul left which aspires after God, Beauty, Love and the Infinite. Tonsure and uniform do not make us monks but vision, ideals, imaginative compassion and unbounded love of the suffering mankind.

6. Monasticism, to be effectively operative in this atomic age, should break all barriers and build

have biased and myopic views about Buddhist *bhikkhus* and Hindu *sadhus*. These are the barriers that stand in the way of closer understanding and co-operation between religions. Our motto should be inclusion, not exclusion, acceptance not rejection, love and sympathy, not hatred and partisan apologetics which make us sing the song of those whose bread we eat. Similarly, in Christian monasteries, besides Christian studies, they should encourage the study of Buddhist, Hindu and allied scriptures and their theologies and vice versa. We must feel it within the heart of our hearts that we all belong to one single human family, whether we belong to white races or coloured continents, to Christianity or the Hindu-Buddhist world. The age in which we could conquer other religions and cultures through imperialism, both political and religious, is gone never to return. Now we have to face people and cultures as equals with democratic freedom. Only Truth will survive in the long run. India, after Independence, has accepted as her motto:

Hindu-Buddhist point of view, but from the Catholic point of view. Similarly, the Christians should study the Hindu-Buddhist world, not with a view to winning converts and ridiculing other religions, but from the Hindu-Buddhist point of view. Then there will be such a big scope for a healthy give-and-take attitude, which will enable us to grow ever wider in our mental horizons, and sink deeper in our heart-realizations. We are all fellow-tramps travelling to the Great Unseen Beyond, which the Buddhist call *Nirvana*, the Hindus *Mukti* and the Christians call Salvation.

We should have the courage to criticise ourselves first, before we could criticise others. Self-righteousness and exclusive claims in matters relating to religion and philosophy lead one to assume the role of a superior one; and this superiority-complex colours all their studies and vision of other religions. As the Pillar Edicts of Asoka say, we should not consider our own religion as the best and condemn the rest. Only our lives — or religion in practice — should prove who is a superior one, not verbal apologetics and arm-chair debates. He is great who is pure, self-controlled, self-knowing, Self-realised, God-conscious and God-seeing. Everything else is mere shell to protect these vital essentials of religion or Dharma.

Canonisation we should not hug, nor fear unjust excommunication. True saints will detest the idea of their being canonised and their statues placed on altars and worshipped. It is wiser to say some "heresies" or commit some sins in order to avoid the torture of being canonised. Let the Devil's advocate win and let us lose before men and gain before God and His Elect.

Many Buddhist monks have misconceptions and prejudices against both Hindus and Christians. Many Hindu monks have misunderstandings about Christian monasticism. Many Christians